

JAMES GEORGE FRAZER



SIR JAMES GEORGE FRAZER

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# JAMES GEORGE FRAZER

The Portrait of a Scholar

BY

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LONDON:

WATTS & CO.,

5 & 6 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4

*First published 1940*

Printed and Published in Great Britain by C. A. Watts & Co. Limited,  
5 & 6 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4



## PREFACE

THE memory of one war, in which much was lost and nothing was achieved, and the advent of another, in which we as individuals may perish and much of our material culture be swept away, has imposed upon us (even upon those of us who are too young to be acutely conscious of mortality) a strong desire to find a purpose in life—a purpose, that is, which will not merely outlive ourselves, but will grow and increase throughout posterity. Many, of course, are satisfied with hopes of individual immortality, whether promised by religion or Spiritualism. Others again, and I among them, beg to doubt the validity of such promises, and face the problem of death with an open, if apprehensive, mind, knowing nothing, expecting nothing, and fearing oblivion.

Yet the desire to escape the finality of death is very strong; we like to think that some part of our personality will outlive us, in our children, in the memory of our friends, in the work of our hand and brain. Or, again, by identifying ourselves with some abiding cause or calling,

we may hope to benefit those who come after us and win some slight modicum of gratitude from posterity. And yet what cause is abiding? The politician and the reformer win or lose their little fights, and at most achieve a page in a history-book. The one abiding cause—or so at least it seems to me—the one increasing purpose, is science, the pursuit of knowledge and truth. It is an endless quest, since it began with the dawn of the human mind and will continue as long as man can see or think—a quest, moreover, which, while it demands the highest efforts and most unselfish labours of its devotees, repays them with no material reward, least of all with a sense of final progress, but at most with a consciousness of having toiled honestly.

Our own generation has seen in Sir James George Frazer one of the greatest intellects that ever applied themselves to knowledge. In him are combined remarkable qualities in a remarkable degree: a power of industry that is unsurpassed, a capacity for taking pains that is practically infinite, a gift for balanced judgment that is at once acute and penetrating, an honesty that can never be questioned, and a modesty that has restrained him from any appearance of dogmatism. These qualities have enabled him to make enduring contributions to learning. They are allied with a gift of eloquence

that has placed his writings among the great achievements of English prose.

Perhaps I may be allowed a few words more to explain and (if that be possible) to justify the writing of this book. My adult education, like that of many another, I suppose, has always proceeded, not at any definite rate or in any definite direction, but by a series of enthusiasms. Upon a happy day I hit upon *The Golden Bough*, carried it home, and devoured it. It affected my outlook more than any other work I have ever read, and so completely and permanently that I felt I could never regard the world around me, its people, and their ways, with the same unseeing eyes as before. The impression of the book upon me was so vivid as to be a personal experience. The implications of that experience have not yet worked themselves out, for I find that the illustrations and arguments of *The Golden Bough* have influenced my outlook even on matters that are in no way dealt with in that book.

After *The Golden Bough* I sought out the author's other works, and devoted myself to them until I knew them all. An article which I wrote on Sir James's works led to a correspondence with Lady Frazer, and to an invitation to assist Sir James (whose failing sight alone made such help necessary) with the work he

had in hand. Thus it fell out that for several years I have been in almost daily contact with Sir James, enjoying an unrivalled opportunity of studying the man and his work. In the following pages I have attempted to give an impression of both to the general reading public.

I wish to express my gratitude to Messrs. Macmillan and to Lady Frazer for their kind permission to quote so extensively from Sir James Frazer's works.

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## CHAPTER I

### BIOGRAPHICAL

“THE man who finds time to keep a private diary does not appear to have fully grasped how vast the world is,” a wise Frenchman once wrote. “The volume of knowledge to be acquired is immense. The study of humanity is scarcely begun; the study of Nature holds in store discoveries we cannot possibly foresee. How, in the presence of such a colossal task as this, can we stop to feast upon ourselves, to doubt life itself?”

Sir James George Frazer, the subject of this biography, has taken too much of knowledge for his province ever to find time to write about himself, and is, moreover, notoriously too modest ever to speak at length upon his own career. Consequently in our search for biographical details we must be content to seek them piecemeal where they lie scattered throughout his works and published correspondence, and in the writings of his critics and friends.

On April 22, 1932, the Freedom of the City of Glasgow was bestowed upon Sir James Frazer, and in acknowledging the honour he dwelt for a little upon his origins and

beginnings. "As you know," he said, "my father, Daniel Frazer, was for long the leading partner of the firm of Frazer and Green, of Glasgow. The firm was founded by his elder brother, Ninian Bannatyne Frazer, as far back as 1830, but my father joined it in his youth and continued in it till his death in 1900, though from 1892 onward he was laid aside by ill-health from active work, and lived in retirement with my mother at their home, Rowmore, on the Gareloch, Dumbartonshire."

In a postscript to this speech published in *Creation and Evolution in Primitive Cosmogonies and other Pieces* (Macmillan, 1935) he draws upon his early memories of his parents. They were both deeply religious, and of a sincere and unquestioning piety. His father collected a good library of English literature and made at least two modest attempts at authorship.

James George Frazer's mother, a woman of very fine character, endeared herself to all by her sweet and gentle nature. She came of a family of well-to-do Glasgow merchants, several of whom owned estates near Glasgow. Among her ancestors were descendants both of the Stuarts and of Cromwell, and through her Sir James can claim remote kinship with the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres and with Sir Ian Hamilton.

Of such parents James George Frazer was



born at Glasgow on January 1, 1854.<sup>1</sup> When he was still young his father bought a house in Helensburgh, a charming residential town at the mouth of the Gareloch, in the estuary of the Clyde, and moved there with his family. The days spent at Helensburgh are recalled in an eloquent page of *The Gorgon's Head*. "To-night, with the muffled roar of London in my ears, I look down the long vista of the past and see again the little white town by the sea, the hills above it tinged with the warm sunset light. I hear again the soft music of the evening bells, the bells of which they told us in our childhood, that though we did not heed them now, we should remember them when we were old. Across the bay, in the deepening shadow, lies sweet Roseneath, embowered in its woods, and beyond the dark and slumbrous waters of the Loch peep glimmering through the twilight the low green hills of Gareloch, while above them tower far into the glory of the sunset sky the rugged mountains of Loch Long."

The upbringing of the young people—there were now two boys and two girls—reflected their parents' religious outlook. "In our household family worship formed part of the daily routine; when my father conducted it, as he usually did, he always read a portion of Scripture

<sup>1</sup> His actual birthplace was a flat in the westernmost house of Brandon Place, at the corner of Blythswood Square.

without comment and prayed extempore, the whole family and the servants kneeling devoutly. The Sabbath was observed with the usual restrictions traditional in Scottish households. We never walked out of the house or the garden except to go to church twice a day in the morning and afternoon, for the modern practice of holding the second service in the evening had not been introduced into Scotland in my youth. In the evening we children sang hymns at our mother's knee, she leading us, for she had a much better musical ear than any of her offspring. Later in the evening our father read to us a good or edifying book. Our own reading was confined to pious or otherwise suitable books or magazines, among which *The Sunday at Home* was perhaps the principal favourite. We learned the Shorter Catechism by heart, and accepted its teaching without question as the standard of orthodoxy." This discipline did not prove irksome or tedious, and left Sir James Frazer with the same deep respect for his parents' piety as Ernest Renan felt throughout his life for the simple faith of the fisherfolk of Tréguier.

At Helensburgh young James Frazer was put to school at Springfield Academy, and thence passed to Larchfield Academy. There, under Mr. Alexander Mackenzie, he learned the rudiments of Greek and Latin and acquired the taste for classical studies which has remained with him so strongly ever since. In the ordinary

course of events James Frazer would have followed his father into his business, and in time would have succeeded him in managing it; but his father perceived his studious tastes and allowed him to pursue them. And so from Larchfield Academy he passed to Glasgow University, where he matriculated in November, 1869—a few years after James Bryce.

“When I joined the University,” he writes, “more than sixty years ago, the course of study for the degree of Master of Arts was very different from what it is now. . . . In my time no option whatever was allowed to a student preparing for the Master’s degree. Every one without exception had to study and satisfy the examiners in precisely the same subjects, which were Greek and Latin, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy (which meant Physics), Logic and Metaphysics, Moral Philosophy, and English Literature. It was an excellent scheme of a sound and liberal education, and I very much doubt if it could have been improved upon by being left to the choice of raw youths in their teens, as were many, if not most, of the students in those days. Certainly, for myself, I have always been glad that in my sixteenth year I was allowed no discretion, but was shepherded into the fold of knowledge by wiser and more experienced heads than my own.”

At Glasgow University Frazer came strongly under the influence of George Gilbert Ramsay,

who was Professor of Latin (or of Humanity, as it was called) from 1863 to 1906. "By his exquisite taste in literature and the innate charm of his delightful personality Ramsay was a most inspiring teacher. To him more than to anyone else I owe the powerful influence which directed the main current of my thoughts for many years to the classics of antiquity."

At a later date Frazer repaid his debt to his old professor by dedicating to him his edition of Pausanias—an honour which Ramsay acknowledged as the highest he had ever received. Frazer was also impressed by John Veitch, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics, "the last representative of the line of purely Scottish philosophers, which, beginning with Hume, or rather with Hutcheson here at Glasgow, was carried on by Reid, Dugald Stewart, Brown, and Hamilton." The first prize in this class, it may be mentioned, was taken by a taciturn student who was later to become known as one of the most erudite of critics, W. P. Ker. Frazer attended besides the lectures of the great physicist, Sir William Thomson, afterwards Lord Kelvin, and "carried away from his class a conception of the physical universe as regulated by exact and absolutely unvarying laws of Nature expressible in mathematical formulas."

At Glasgow he thought of competing for the Snell Exhibition, which would have taken him to Balliol College, Oxford, as it had taken Adam

Smith and many another Scotsman. But his father mistrusted the High Church tendencies of Oxford, and at the suggestion of a friend he went to compete for an entrance scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge, in December, 1873. Having won the scholarship, he entered Trinity as a student the following autumn. Possibly he would have been more at home among the philosophers of Oxford than among the scientists of Cambridge, where, it has been hinted, his reputation is respected, his person revered, and his works ignored. "Thanks to the wisdom of his father, James escaped the dangers of Anglican theology," wrote Albert Houtin in *Larousse Mensuel* for March, 1923. "But the best and most anti-episcopal of fathers cannot foresee every peril. A few years after his arrival at Cambridge there followed the most learned and probably most heterodox of his compatriots, a former college professor, discharged by his church, the Orientalist William Robertson Smith. James became his friend and disciple. When he began to publish books which betrayed the influence of his master, his father, enfeebled by age, had no longer the power to discern their conclusions: he only felt happy and proud to see his son a great scholar."

His father's intention was that he should enter the legal profession. He actually qualified for the Bar, and was admitted to the Middle Temple in 1881. Though he never practised

law, his legal training was doubtless of great value to him when he came to weigh up the evidence of observers of primitive usages, and to draw deductions from data all over the world.

At Cambridge, though he is said to have been attracted at one time by the subtle problems of spectrum analysis, he continued to study the classics, and in 1879, when competing for a Fellowship of Trinity College, wrote a thesis on *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*. This was published fifty years later, in 1930. The Fellowship of Trinity College originally won by it has been thrice renewed, and is now held for life.

The rooms occupied by Frazer as a Fellow of Trinity were just to the north of the Great Gate, overlooking the Great Court. From his window, in November, 1879, he saw the funerary procession of James Clerk Maxwell cross the Great Court and enter the chapel. Rouse Ball, in his interesting little book on Trinity, thus describes that part of the building: "Turning to the right and walking round the Court, we come between the Great Gate and the Chapel to a staircase leading to various living rooms occupied by resident members of the College. . . . This particular staircase, which I have taken as a typical one, contains one Fellow's set, five undergraduates' sets, one of which is now used by the porters, and an odd room. The rooms on the ground floor on the right hand side on entering the staircase were occupied by

Thackeray,<sup>1</sup> and later by the present Astronomer Royal; those on the opposite side by Macaulay; the rooms on the first floor next the gate were occupied by Isaac Newton, and later by Lightfoot, afterwards Bishop of Durham, and R. C. Jebb, the Greek scholar; and those on the opposite side by J. G. Frazer, who has done so much to investigate the habits and thought of primitive man." When his library had grown to such a size that it threatened to sink through the ceiling of the room below Frazer moved to a set of rooms in Whewell's Court. Then, in 1908, he was given the use of a large room behind the chapel, where most of his books still are. He was succeeded in the possession of the rooms in Whewell's Court, after an interval, by his friend, the great though modest poet and Latin scholar, A. E. Housman.

His interest in anthropology, the science with which his name has since been most closely associated, was originally aroused by a reading of Tylor's great work, *Primitive Culture*. The interest so aroused was further stimulated by the friendship of William Robertson Smith, whom Frazer regards as the greatest man he has ever known.

The most important intellectual achievements of the nineteenth century, it might be main-

<sup>1</sup> These rooms have since disappeared from the staircase, having been annexed to the Porter's Lodge at the Great Gate.

tained, arose not so much from the discoveries of new facts, though these were tremendous, as from the use of a new method of approaching and interpreting those facts. The new weapon was the Comparative Method. By the use of it Franz Bopp in 1816 demonstrated the common origin of the Indo-European languages. By applying it to the study of law Sir Henry Maine threw a flood of light upon the origin and growth of human institutions. The chief claim to enduring fame of William Robertson Smith arises from his application of the Comparative Method to the study of religions. The important results thus arrived at are discussed by Sir James Frazer in his biographical sketch of Smith, published as part of *The Gorgon's Head*. "The idea," he says, "of regarding the religions of the world not dogmatically but historically—in other words, not as systems of truth or falsehood to be demonstrated or refuted, but as phenomena of consciousness to be studied like any other aspect of human nature—is one which seems hardly to have suggested itself before the nineteenth century. Now when, laying aside as irrelevant to the purpose in hand the question of the truth or falsehood of religious beliefs, and the question of the wisdom or folly of religious practices, we examine side by side the religions of the different races and ages, we find that, while they differ from each other in many particulars, the resemblances between them are numerous



and fundamental, and that they mutually illustrate and explain each other, the distinctly stated faith and circumstantial ritual of one race often clearing up ambiguities in the faith and practice of other races. Thus the comparative study of religion soon forces on us the conclusion that the course of religious evolution has been, up to a certain point, very similar among all men, and that no one religion, at all events in its earlier stages, can be fully understood without a comparison of it with many others."

Frazer and Robertson Smith were intimates at Cambridge, and Smith, knowing his friend's interest in anthropology, asked him to write articles on "Taboo" and "Totemism" for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which had been under Smith's editorship since 1881. These articles duly appeared in Vol. XXIII of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (ninth edition, 1888). "The researches I made for these articles were the beginning of a systematic application to anthropology and especially to a study of the backward races of men whom we call savages and barbarians."

The facts of Frazer's life consist essentially of a list of his works. His first book to be published was actually Sallust's *Catilina et Iugurtha*, edited by George Long, revised by J. G. Frazer, and issued by Bell in 1884. His interest in anthropology is reflected in his next publication, a

pamphlet entitled *Questions on the Manners, Customs, etc., of Uncivilized or Semi-civilized Peoples*, which appeared in 1887. This pamphlet he distributed among missionaries, administrators, and others in remote parts of the world, and in this way he turned many able minds to the study of primitive man. The material thus gathered he put freely at the disposal of his friend Robertson Smith, who wrote in his great book on the *Religion of the Semites*: "In analysing the origin of ritual institutions I have often had occasion to consult analogies in the usages of early peoples beyond the Semitic field. In this part of the work I have had invaluable assistance from my friend, Mr. J. G. Frazer, who has given me free access to his unpublished collections on the superstitions and religious observances of primitive nations in all parts of the globe."

His greatest work, *The Golden Bough*, was published originally as two volumes in 1890, and in later editions, as we shall see elsewhere, underwent considerable revision and extension. In 1895 he edited a volume of passages of the Bible chosen for their literary beauty and interest. In the following year he married Mrs. Lilly Grove, a native of France, and the author of several charming books for children in French and English. She has proved an ideal help-mate, sharing to the full in the great scholar's arduous labours, supplying a grasp of practical

matters which he completely lacks, and yet remaining for ever modestly in the background.

Frazer's edition of Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, the product of many years of labour, appeared in six volumes in 1898. Part of this work was reprinted in one volume as *Pausanias and other Greek Sketches. Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* in 1905 was followed in 1910 by the four volumes of *Totemism and Exogamy*, and this by the first volume of *Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead* in 1913. Subsequent volumes of this work appeared in 1922 and 1924. Meanwhile in 1907 he was appointed Professor of Social Anthropology in the University of Liverpool, a post which he held for less than a year. His inaugural lecture, on the scope of social anthropology, was published in book form in 1908. In the following year a discourse on the influence of superstitions on the growth of institutions was published under the title, *Psyche's Task*.

In 1912 there appeared *Letters of William Cowper*, chosen and edited with a memoir and a few notes by J. G. Frazer, in two volumes, and in 1915 he edited a selection from the essays of Joseph Addison. He also published several essays written in the manner of Addison as *Sir Roger de Coverley and other Literary Pieces* in 1920. These were reprinted in 1927 as *The Gorgon's Head*.

His next important work, *Folk-Lore in the Old*

*Testament*, appeared in three volumes in 1918. An abridgment in one volume came out in 1923. In 1926 the first and only volume of *The Worship of Nature* was published, and in 1929 an edition of the *Fasti* of Ovid, in five volumes. This was followed a year later by an essay on *Myths of the Origin of Fire*. In 1931 he published a collection of essays, addresses, and reviews under the title *Garnered Sheaves*. A further collection of essays appeared in 1935 as *Creation and Evolution in Primitive Cosmogonies and other Pieces*. A slight volume on *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, published in 1933, was followed by a second volume with the same title, dealing with other aspects of the same subject, and a third and concluding volume appeared in 1936. In the same year appeared also *Aftermath: a Supplement to the Golden Bough*, and in the following year *Totemica: a Supplement to Totemism and Exogamy*. Finally, his notebooks, comprising material largely unused in his published works, have appeared in four stout demy quarto volumes under the general title of *Anthologia Anthropologica*. They are *Native Races of Africa and Madagascar* (1938), *Native Races of Australasia* (1939), *Native Races of Asia and Europe* (1939), and *Native Races of America* (1939).

The marvellous industry, erudition, and eloquence represented by this bald list of books have aroused the admiration of students all over the

world, and many tokens of regard have been bestowed upon their author. He was knighted in 1914, and in 1925 was awarded the Order of Merit. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1920. Honorary degrees have been showered upon him—the Hon. D.C.L. of Oxford, Hon. LL.D. of Cambridge, Hon. Litt.D. of Cambridge, Durham, and Manchester, the *Doctor Honoris Causa* of the Universities of Paris and Strassburg. He is, moreover, a Fellow of the British Academy, Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Honorary Bencher of the Middle Temple, Associate Member of the *Institut de France*, *Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur*, Commander of the Order of Leopold of Belgium, Corresponding Member of the Prussian Academy of Science, Extraordinary Member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Science.

On the other hand, he has steadfastly refused honours and appointments that would in any way stand in the way of his work. He declined the offer of a chair at Manchester and the invitation to lecture on the history of religion at the Sorbonne, an appointment last held by Renan. And, having accepted a professorship at Liverpool, he soon resigned it to return to his researches at Cambridge. The lucrative post of editor of the Loeb Classical Library he also declined on the ground that it would take up too much of his time.

In 1921 he was paid a singular compliment

when the Frazer Lectureship on Social Anthropology was founded in his honour at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, and Liverpool. The occasion was marked by an *Address to Sir James George Frazer* written by Professor A. E. Housman and subscribed by over two hundred leading figures in the world of learning.

“The friends and admirers [it runs] who have united to found in your honour an annual lectureship in Social Anthropology, a science requiring no such link to connect it with your name, are not altogether content to set up their monument and withdraw in silence. They feel, and they hope that you will understand, the wish to approach more nearly an author whose works have bound to him in familiarity and affection even those to whom he is not personally known, and to indulge, by this short address, an emotion warmer than mere intellectual gratitude.

“The Golden Bough, compared by Virgil to the mistletoe but now revealing some affinity to the banyan, has not only waxed a great tree but has spread to a spacious and hospitable forest, whose king receives homage in many tongues from a multitude resorting thither for its fruit or timber or refreshing shade. There they find learning mated with literature, labour disguised in ease, and a museum of dark and uncouth superstitions invested with the charm of a truly sympathetic magic. There you have

gathered together, for the admonition of a proud and oblivious race, the scattered and fading relics of its foolish childhood, whether withdrawn from our view among savage folk, or lying unnoticed at our doors. The forgotten milestones of the road which man has travelled, the mazes and blind alleys of his appointed progress through time, are illuminated by your art and genius, and the strangest of remote and ancient things are brought near to the minds and hearts of your contemporaries.

“They return you thanks for all that they have received at your hands, and they wish you years of life and continuance of strength to crown with new sheaves that rich and various harvest of discoveries which has already rewarded your untiring industry and your single-hearted quest of truth.”

With this we may quote the letter sent to Sir James George Frazer by the Prussian Academy of Sciences upon the occasion of his eightieth birthday—a letter which illustrates the high regard entertained for the author among a people not readily impressed by the achievements of foreign savants.

“With those who wish you well, either personally or in spirit, upon the celebration of your eightieth birthday, the Prussian Academy of Science, which proudly numbers you among its members, wishes to join. As we look back with you this day, from the heights of wisdom

and new knowledge gained, upon your whole career and its beginnings, we see a lifetime of exceptional perseverance and steadfastness. Three years ago you published that essay on Plato with which you satisfied your great teacher, Henry Jackson, at Trinity College in 1879 on your deep humanistic training, from the most serious and penetrating study of Greek philosophy, according to the incomparable tradition of the old English universities. To the study of classical antiquity also belong your six-volumed edition of Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, wherein, without being a specialist in archæology, you presented to the world an immense amount of material in your notes and explanations, and the fruit of your later years, the monumental edition of the *Fasti* of Ovid in five volumes which really presupposes your life-work in the field of the history of religions.

“Even before the preparation of Pausanias your personal talents and interests were displayed in the first edition of *The Golden Bough*, if we put aside your early work on *Totemism*, although this, like your *Golden Bough*, grew later to a great new edifice, built upon broader and stronger foundations. It is characteristic of your method of work that in the succeeding editions of this, your greatest production, the chapters of the original production grew to independent works in several volumes. The title, which indicates the classical philological



starting-point even in the latest form of the whole work, the wonderful golden branch in the holy grove of Vergil, acts to-day as a symbol of your whole development, for the search for this secret twig in the classical wood of the Sibyl of Cumæ has drawn you deeper and deeper into the dense primeval forest of folklorist investigation in all parts of the world. Your interesting correspondence with the great explorer Sir Baldwin Spencer shows most clearly how you incessantly derived new material from the recent science of anthropology, among whose fathers you are already numbered by history, and which has become ever more your chief interest. The great number of works which in the last two decades you have added to your standard work, shows the universal importance of this new science in the different branches of religious and cultural history, in whose prehistoric spiritual strata you have penetrated deeply. You have not believed that with the magic wand of anthropology you would trace the sources of all spiritual mysteries, and have often described yourself as a pioneer, after whose work of clearing and road-making others must come and approach the matter with subtler methods. Yet every step of scientific endeavour bears its own measure of perfection, and whoever has seen your human personality develop in your work cannot doubt that you have achieved it."

## CHAPTER II

### THE GOLDEN BOUGH

*The Golden Bough*, the first of Sir James George Frazer's larger works and his most important contribution to the world of thought, appeared originally as two volumes in 1890. (This edition of the work was read to Tennyson while his portrait was being painted by Watts—a fact mentioned in the poet's biography. Both poet and artist seem to have been impressed by the work, for it is noticeable that the background of the portrait bears a pattern of mistletoe.) These were superseded by an edition in three volumes in 1900, and this in turn by an edition in twelve volumes which were published between 1911 and 1915. A thirteenth volume, *Aftermath*, was published in 1936. An abridged version, which has since run through several editions, appeared as a single volume in 1922, and in 1924 *Leaves from the Golden Bough*, selected by Lady Frazer and illustrated by H. M. Brock, was issued. But to appreciate the erudition and stamina of the author one must work through the complete twelve volumes.

Sir James has recently given a short definition of the purpose of his great work. "The

cycle of *The Golden Bough*," he says, "depicts, in its sinuous outline, in its play of alternate light and shadow, the long evolution by which the thoughts and efforts of man have passed through the successive stages of Magic, Religion, and Science. It is, in some measure, an epic of humanity which, starting from magic, attains to science in its ripe age, and will find there, perhaps, its death. For the monster which has created human thought to-day threatens to annihilate the very race which depends upon it for its progress and well-being.

"The cycle of *The Golden Bough* treats principally, almost completely, with the past. The sacrifice of the Divine King, put to death for the good of his people, is studied at length in its pages: that episode, so important in Christian theology, is like the symbolical epitome of the lugubrious history of humanity."

Æneas, in the sixth book of the *Æneid*, is told that if he would visit the abode of the dead he must bear with him as an offering to the Queen of the underworld a golden bough plucked from a certain tree in a shadowy grove, identified by the ancients with the one sacred to Diana on the shore of the woodland lake of Nemi, in the Alban hills. Diana's priest reigned as King of the Woods until a fugitive slave should contrive to pluck a branch from the sacred tree, strike him with it, kill him in

single combat, and reign in his stead. The curious tradition interested Macaulay, who wrote :—

The still glassy lake that sleeps  
Beneath Aricia's trees—  
Those trees in whose dim shadow  
The ghastly priest doth reign,  
The priest who slew the slayer,  
And shall himself be slain.

The problem of the priesthood or sacred kingship of Nemi, and the associated legend of the Golden Bough, attracted Frazer, and forms the principal thesis of his great work. "I soon found," he writes, "that in attempting to settle one question I had raised many more; wider and wider prospects opened out before me, and thus, step by step, I was lured on into far-spreading fields of primitive thought which had been but little explored by my predecessors."

He addresses himself to his task in these words: "Recent researches into the early history of man have revealed the essential similarity with which, under many superficial differences, the human mind has elaborated its first crude philosophy of life. Accordingly, if we can show that a barbarous custom, like that of the priesthood of Nemi, has existed elsewhere; if we can prove that these motives have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generically alike; if we can show,

lastly, that these very motives, with some of their derivative institutions, were actually at work in classical antiquity; then we may fairly infer that at a remote age the same motives gave birth to the priesthood of Nemi. Such an inference, in default of direct evidence as to how the priesthood did actually arise, can never amount to demonstration. But it will be more or less probable according to the degree of completeness with which it fulfils the conditions I have indicated. The object of this book is, by meeting these conditions, to offer a fairly probable explanation of the priesthood of Nemi."

Why had Diana's priest at Nemi, the King of the Wood, to slay his predecessor? And why, before doing so, had he to pluck the branch of a sacred tree? These are the two main questions that have to be solved. The first two volumes of *The Golden Bough*, entitled *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, are concerned with the principles of magic and the evolution of the sacred kingship. Among primitive tribes, who believe their welfare to depend upon the performance of magical rites, the magician rises to a position of much influence, akin to that of a chief or king. Here, in an aside, we have a penetrating piece of observation: "The general result is that at this stage of social evolution the supreme power tends to fall into the hands of men of the keenest

intelligence and the most unscrupulous character. If we could balance the harm they do by their knavery against the benefits they confer by their superior sagacity, it might well be found that the good greatly outweighed the evil. For more mischief has probably been wrought in the world by honest fools in high places than by intelligent rascals. Once your shrewd rogue has attained the height of his ambition, and has no longer any selfish end to further, he may, and often does, turn his talents, his experience, his resources, to the service of the public."

As human thought progressed from the idea of magic to the idea of religion, as the conception was evolved of powers superior to man which directed and controlled the course of Nature and of life and had to be propitiated or conciliated, so also there arose sacred kings, supposed to be endowed with divine powers. The divine kings were often identified with forces or objects of Nature. The King of the Wood at Nemi seems to have been one of these divine kings and to have mated with the divine Queen of the Wood, Diana. Virbius, whom the King of the Wood represented, was probably a form of Jupiter regarded as King of the Greenwood, and especially of the oak, while Diana also seems to have been especially associated with the oak.

"To apply these conclusions to the priest of Nemi, we may suppose that as the mate of

Diana he represented originally Dianus or Janus rather than Jupiter, but that the difference between these deities was of old merely superficial, going little deeper than the names, and leaving practically unaffected the essential functions of the god as a power of the sky, the thunder, and the oak. It was fitting, therefore, that his human representative at Nemi should dwell, as we have seen reason to believe he did, in an oak grove. His title of the King of the Wood clearly indicates the sylvan character of the deity whom he served; and since he could be assailed only by him who had plucked the bough of a certain tree in the grove, his own life might be said to be bound up with that of the sacred tree. Thus he not only served but embodied the great Aryan god of the oak; and as an oak-god he would mate with the oak-goddess, whether she went by the name of Egeria or Diana. Their union, however consummated, would be deemed essential to the fertility of the earth and the fecundity of man and beast. Further, as the oak-god had grown into a god of the sky, the thunder, and the rain, so his human representative would be required, like many other kings, to cause the clouds to gather, the thunder to peal, and the rain to descend in due season, that the fields and orchards might bear fruit and the pastures be covered with luxuriant herbage. . . . There, among the green woods and beside the

still waters of the lonely hills, the ancient Aryan worship of the god of the oak, the thunder, and the dripping sky lingered in its early, almost Druidical form, long after a great political and intellectual revolution had shifted the capital of the Latin religion from the forest to the city, from Nemi to Rome."

In the Preface to *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, the next part of *The Golden Bough*, the author relates how, from believing that the institution of Taboo was confined to the brown and black races of the Pacific, he has arrived at the conclusion that it is only one of a number of similar systems of superstitions which among many—perhaps among all—races of men have contributed in large measure, under many different names, and with many variations of detail, to build up the complex fabric of society in all the various forms which we describe as religious, social, political, moral, and economic. Numerous and strict taboos are imposed upon the divine king or priest, and his life is regulated by minute rules: "He is the point of support on which hangs the balance of the world, and the slightest irregularity on his part may overthrow the delicate equipoise." Many instances, drawn from all over the world, are given of tabooed acts, persons, things, and words that have been imposed upon human gods for their own safety and the welfare of the community.



*The Dying God*, the third part of *The Golden Bough*, is concerned with the question: Why had the King of the Wood at Nemi regularly to perish by the hand of his successor? The gods with whom the imagination of early man peopled the darkness of the unknown were created in his own likeness, and being himself a mortal he naturally supposed his creatures to be in the same sad predicament. Hence "the motive for slaying a man-god is a fear lest with the enfeeblement of his body in sickness or old age his sacred spirit should suffer a corresponding decay, which might imperil the general course of Nature and with it the existence of his worshippers, who believe the cosmic energies to be mysteriously knit up with those of their human divinity." This part of Frazer's hypothesis has been greatly strengthened by the discovery, in recent years, of kings who are actually put to death. Striking examples have been described by Prof. C. G. Seligman among the Shilluk of the Upper Nile, and by C. K. Meek, H. R. Palmer, and P. A. Talbot among the tribes of Nigeria.

Early in *Attis*, *Adonis*, *Osiris*, the next section of the great work, we have one of those draughts of eloquence with which the author often stimulates the reader, who might otherwise flag long ere the end was in sight. "The spectacle of the great changes which annually pass over the face of the earth has powerfully

impressed the minds of men in all ages, and stirred them to meditate on the causes of transformations so vast and wonderful. Their curiosity has not been purely disinterested; for even the savage cannot fail to perceive how intimately his own life is bound up with the life of Nature, and how the same processes which freeze the stream and strip the earth of vegetation menace him with extinction. At a certain stage of development men seem to have imagined that the means of averting the threatened calamity were in their own hands, and that they could hasten or retard the flight of the seasons by magic art. Accordingly they performed ceremonies and recited spells to make the rain to fall, the sun to shine, animals to multiply, and the fruits of the earth to grow. In course of time the slow advance of knowledge, which has dispelled so many cherished illusions, convinced at least the more thoughtful portion of mankind that the alternations of summer and winter, of spring and autumn, were not merely the result of their own magical rites, but that some deeper cause, some mightier power, was at work behind the shifting scenes of Nature. They now pictured to themselves the growth and decay of vegetation, the birth and death of living creatures, as effects of the waxing or waning strength of divine beings, of gods and goddesses, who were born and died, who married and begot children, on the pattern of human life."

An investigation of the myth of Adonis and the legends associated with him points to the conclusion that among Semitic people in early times Adonis was often personated by priestly kings or other members of the royal family, and that these his human representatives were of old put to death, whether periodically or occasionally, in their divine character. But as time went on the cruel custom was apparently mitigated in various ways—by substituting an effigy or an animal for the man, or by allowing the destined victim to escape with a merely make-believe sacrifice. To the lively imagination of the Greeks the death and resurrection of Adonis offered a mythical expression of the annual decay and revival of plant life.

Attis was the Phrygian counterpart of Adonis, for he too appears to have been a god of vegetation, and his death and resurrection were annually mourned over at a festival in spring. Analogies from Greek and Scandinavian mythology make it seem not improbable that in Phrygia a man-god may have been hanged each year on the pine-tree, which was sacred to Attis.

The worship of Attis and of Cybele, the great Asiatic goddess of fertility who is held by some to have been the mother of Attis, became popular throughout the Roman Empire: indeed, the spread of Oriental faiths contributed in no slight measure to undermine the fabric

of Greek and Roman civilization by inculcating the salvation of the individual soul as the supreme aim of life. Nor were they without influence upon the Christian religion, for the festival of Christmas was borrowed by the Church from the worship of Mithra, while the Easter celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ appears to have been assimilated to the celebration of the death and resurrection of Attis, which was held at Rome at the same season.

Osiris, the son of the earth-god and the sky-goddess, who, being killed and dismembered, was yet brought to life again, and now reigns as king of the dead in the other world, presents the Egyptian counterpart of Adonis and Attis, for in his death and resurrection we again see a reflection of the annual decay and growth of vegetation.

Having thus examined the figure of the dying and reviving god as typified in Adonis, Attis, and Osiris, the author turns in *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild* to pursue the same theme in other religions and among other races. This conception was not restricted to the East, but is represented by Dionysus among the Greeks and is to be traced elsewhere. "We need not, with some inquirers in ancient and modern times, suppose that these Western peoples borrowed from the older civilization of the Orient the conception of the Dying and Reviving God, together with the solemn ritual, in

which that conception was dramatically set forth before the eyes of the worshippers. More probably the resemblance which may be traced in this respect between the religions of the East and West is no more than what we commonly, though incorrectly, call a fortuitous coincidence, the effect of similar causes acting alike on the similar constitution of the human mind in different countries and under different skies. The Greek had no need to journey into far countries to learn the vicissitudes of the seasons, to mark the fleeting beauty of the damask rose, the transient glory of the golden corn, the passing splendour of the purple grapes. Year by year in his own beautiful land he beheld, with natural regret, the bright pomp of summer fading into the gloom and stagnation of winter, and year by year he hailed with natural delight the outburst of fresh life in spring. Accustomed to personify the forces of Nature, to tinge her cold abstractions with the warm hues of imagination, to clothe her naked realities with the gorgeous draperies of a mythic fancy, he fashioned for himself a train of gods and goddesses, of spirits and elves, out of the shifting panorama of the seasons, and followed the annual fluctuations of their fortunes with alternate emotions of cheerfulness and dejection, of gladness and sorrow, which found their natural expression in alternate rites of rejoicing and lamentations, of revelry and mourning."

We may profitably linger a little over such a passage as this. Apart from its brilliant imagery and subtle rhythm, which at once charm the eye and ear, we may consider it as an illustration of a wisely conservative tendency in the speculations of *The Golden Bough*. From the similarity in the conception of Adonis, Attis, and Osiris many would assume that one was derived from the other; but Sir James chooses to see in it "the effect of similar causes acting alike on the similar constitution of the human mind in different countries and under different skies." Upon a later page he states his outlook more specifically: "If there is one general conclusion which seems to emerge from the mass of particulars, I venture to think that it is the essential similarity in the working of the less developed human mind among all races, which corresponds to the essential similarity in their bodily frame revealed by comparative anatomy." This is important, for it is upon this point that the author of *The Golden Bough* differs from many contemporary anthropologists, who in similar habits and customs see proofs of contact and exchange of ideas between different races and peoples.

We return from this digression to find our author discussing the many manifestations of the corn-spirit in folk-lore—as a woman, as a man, as a wolf, a hare, a cat, a goat, and so on. The consideration of the corn-spirit in

animal form leads to the interesting comment : "In general it may be said that all so-called unclean animals were originally sacred; the reason for not eating them was that they were divine."

Among many primitive people can be traced the custom of eating the new corn sacramentally as the body of the corn-spirit, in the belief that this would enable the eater to share the corn-god's powers. The doctrine of transubstantiation, or the magical conversion of bread into flesh, was recognized by the ancient Aztecs and Brahmans, and "on the whole it would seem that neither the ancient Hindoos nor the ancient Mexicans had much to learn from the most refined mysteries of Catholic theology." Probably at a later stage of development the custom of eating the first-fruits sacramentally gave way to the custom of sacrificing them to propitiate the gods.

The discussion of the theory and practice of the Dying God is brought to a conclusion in the next part of *The Golden Bough*, which is entitled *The Scapegoat*. In the primitive mind there arose the idea that evil could be transferred to inanimate objects such as stones and sticks, to animals, or to men. Hence it was thought that by transferring the evils of a whole people to an individual and sacrificing that individual, it might be possible to get rid of the accumulated sorrows of the entire

community. In this way we may explain the origin of human scapegoats, such as were well known in classical antiquity, and seem to have persisted in mediæval Europe.

“On the one hand we have seen that it has been customary to kill the human or animal god in order to save his divine life from being weakened by the inroads of age. On the other hand we have seen that it has been customary to have a general expulsion of evils and sins once a year. Now, if it occurred to people to combine these two customs, the result would be the employment of the dying god as a scapegoat. He was killed, not originally to take away sin, but to save the dying life from the degeneracy of old age; but, since he had to be killed at any rate, people may have thought that they might as well seize the opportunity to lay upon him the burden of their sufferings and sins, in order that he might bear it away with him to the unknown world beyond the grave.” This might be set beside the passage we have already quoted to show that the author, although wisely cautious in speculating, is yet capable of brilliant and far-reaching hypotheses.

*Balder the Beautiful*, the concluding part of *The Golden Bough*, is concerned with the problem which gives its title to the whole work. The Golden Bough was apparently charged with the mysterious quality of holiness or taboo,



as were many other inanimate objects looked upon as divine. It may even have been regarded as the place where the Priest of Nemi deposited his soul for safety: the belief that a man's soul may be deposited in a secure place outside his body, and that so long as it remains there intact he himself is invulnerable and immortal, can be illustrated by folk-tales told by many people. The actual bough may have been a branch of mistletoe, which sometimes, though rarely, is found growing on an oak, and by the very rarity of its appearance excites the wonder and stimulates the devotion of ignorant men. Hence we may draw a parallel between the Priest of Nemi and Balder the Beautiful, of Scandinavian mythology, who could not be injured by anything on earth or in heaven, except by a bough of mistletoe. The sanctity of the oak and the relation of the tree to the sky-god were suggested by the frequency with which oaks are struck by lightning, while the sacredness of the mistletoe was perhaps due to the belief that the plant fell on the tree in a flash of lightning.

"And what we have said of Balder in the oak forests of Scandinavia may perhaps, with all due diffidence in a question so obscure and uncertain, be applied to the priest of Diana, the King of the Wood, at Aricia in the oak forests of Italy. He may have personated in flesh and blood the great Italian god of the sky, Jupiter,

who had kindly come down from heaven in a lightning flash to dwell among men in the mistle-toe—the thunder-besom—the Golden Bough—growing on the sacred oak beside the still waters of the lake of Nemi. If that was so, we need not wonder that the priest guarded with drawn sword the mystic bough which contained the god's life and his own. The goddess whom he served and married was herself, if I am right, no other than the Queen of Heaven, the true wife of the sky-god. For she, too, loved the solitude of the woods and the lonely hills, and sailing overhead on clear nights in the likeness of the silver moon she looked down with pleasure on her own fair image reflected on the calm, the burnished surface of the lake, Diana's Mirror."

With this conclusion our author's task is completed, and in a magnificent peroration he bids farewell to Nemi, and we to one of the grandest, one of the wisest products of the human mind, "in comparison with which all other attempts to solve the riddle of the sphinx must appear dwarfish."

It would be presumptuous to say so had we not the author's word for it, but the main thesis, the investigation of the priesthood at Nemi, is hardly the most important part of the work. "While nominally investigating a particular problem of ancient mythology, I have really been discussing questions of more general interest

which concern the gradual evolution of human thought from savagery to civilization." What makes *The Golden Bough* so important, apart from its eminence as a work of consummate prose, is the vast number of facts that it contains, and the flood of light that it throws upon the customs and beliefs of primitive man, upon ancient mythology, upon the religion and superstition of ourselves and our neighbours. In forming his mighty synthesis the author has turned aside again and again to explore by-paths, to investigate and explain customs and usages which, considered singly, would appear meaningless. We may take, by way of example, the festival of Twelfth Night. After illustrating how that festival is (or was) observed in different parts of France and England, in Macedonia, in Ireland and Scotland, in Germany and Austria, and in Ancient India (here a reference to *The Hymns of the Rigveda*), our author goes on to suggest: "The coincidence of the name for month with the name for moon in the various Aryan languages points to the conclusion that the year of our remote ancestors was primarily based on observation of the moon rather than the sun; but, as a year of twelve lunar months or three hundred and fifty-four days (reckoning the months at twenty-nine and thirty days alternately) falls short of the solar year of three hundred and sixty-five and a quarter days by roundly twelve days, the discrepancy could not

fail to attract the attention of an intelligent people, such as the primitive Aryans must be supposed to have been, who had made some progress in the arts of life; and the most obvious way of removing the discrepancy and equating the lunar with the solar year is to add twelve days at the end of each period of twelve lunar months so as to bring the total days of the year up to three hundred and sixty-six."

We have attempted to follow the main course of the author's reasoning, and to give the main conclusions at which he arrives; but a summary like this does scant justice to *The Golden Bough*. We may therefore quote the considered judgment of a competent critic, a man of considerable learning. "In its boundless erudition, its constructive imagination, and its wealth of suggestion, *The Golden Bough* stands forth as perhaps the most notable contribution of the age to our knowledge of the evolution of the human race" (Dr. G. P. Gooch). In *The Discovery of Man* Mr. Stanley Casson goes so far as to say of Frazer that "he accumulates a body of information more accurately set forth and more conscientiously compiled than any hitherto collected by any scholar in any land." And yet another quality calls for appreciation, for, in spite of its length and its many digressions, the work is closely knit together by a skilful use of repetition and summary; the architecture of the whole thing is superb.

*The Golden Bough* marks the highest level of our author's powers, for, though his industry and eloquence were to remain unimpaired, his later works show an increasing distrust of theory, and his most recent publications, such as the three volumes of *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, are mainly composed of facts, diligently collected and digested, with little attempt to deduce hypotheses from them.

## CHAPTER III

### CLASSICAL STUDIES

FRAZER went to Cambridge as a classical student. As we have seen, he originally won a fellowship at Trinity with a thesis on Plato, and his first published work was an edition of Sallust. In succeeding years the study of anthropology has not ousted his first love for ancient literature. On the other hand, he has carried on the two studies in a manner that has been beneficial to both, for his acquaintance with the classics has made him familiar with the folk-lore and religious beliefs of Greece and Rome, while his background of knowledge of primitive people in all parts of the world has helped him in many cases to point out parallels between classical and savage customs.

The problem with which *The Golden Bough* primarily deals—namely, the origin of the sacred priesthood at Nemi—is of course of classical interest, although in investigating it the author had to travel far from the hills of Alba Longa and the banks of Tiber. More strictly classical, and probably his greatest contribution to that branch of study, was his edition of Pausanias, which appeared in six volumes in 1898.

Of Pausanias we know little except that he travelled widely in Greece in the second century A.D. and wrote down what he saw in his *Description of Greece*, apparently intending it as a guide-book for other travellers.

“When we come to examine the substance of his book,” the editor tells us, “we quickly perceive that his interests were mainly antiquarian and religious, and that, though he professes to describe the whole of Greece or, more literally, all things Greek, what he does describe is little more than the antiquities of the country and the religious traditions and ritual of the people. He interested himself neither in the natural beauties of Greece nor in the ordinary life of his contemporaries. For all the notice he takes of the one or the other Greece might almost have been a wilderness and its cities uninhabited or peopled only at rare intervals by a motley throng who suddenly appeared as by magic, moved singing through the streets in gay procession with flaring torches and waving censers, dyed the marble pavements of the temples with the blood of victims, filled the air with the smoke and savour of their burning flesh, and then melted away as mysteriously as they had come, leaving the deserted streets and temples to echo only to the footstep of some solitary traveller who explored with awe and wonder the monuments of a vanished race.”

Frazer's edition of Pausanias, the product of

nine years of study, and of several visits to Greece between 1890 and 1895, is a monument of erudition. It consists of an English translation, critical notes upon the Greek text, and an illustrative commentary. Pausanias was an indifferent writer, for he wrote "a loose, clumsy, ill-jointed, ill-compacted, rickety, ramshackle style, without ease or grace or elegance of any sort." From Frazer's translation we get a fair idea of Pausanias's abruptness, but scarcely any of his other shortcomings, for it is in racy English. By way of illustration the beginning of the Greek text may be quoted :—

Τῆς ἡπείρου τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς κατὰ νήσους τὰς κυκλάδας  
καὶ πέλαγος τὸ Αἰγαῖον ἄκρα Σούνιον πρόκειται τῆς γῆς  
Ἀττικῆς · καὶ ἡμῖν τε παραπλεύσαντι τὴν ἄκραν ἐστί, καὶ  
ναὸς Ἀθηνᾶς Σουνιάδος ἐπὶ κορυφῇ τῆς ἄκρας.

In translation this becomes :—

"Cape Sunium, in the land of Attica, juts out from that part of the Greek mainland which faces the Cyclades and the Ægean Sea. When you have sailed past the cape you come to a harbour, and there is a temple of Sunian Athena on the summit of the cape."

With this we may compare the corresponding part of the commentary :—

"Cape Sunium, now called Cape *Collona* or *Kollonnaes*, from the far-seen columns which crown its brow, is a massive and lofty headland of rugged crystalline rock running far into the



sea and joined to the mainland by a low sandy isthmus. The sides of the headland fall sheer into the sea in cliffs about 200 feet high. On the eastern side of the isthmus is a narrow creek where sailing vessels, unable to weather the cape, take shelter. The bay on the western side of the isthmus is roomy but is exposed to the full fury of the south wind. The summit of the Cape is overgrown with shrubs and is surrounded by a ruined fortified wall, except on the brink of precipices that render all fortification needless."

The commentary, which fills four of the six volumes (Vol. I being devoted to the translation, and Vol. VI to Indices and Maps),<sup>1</sup> is a summary of all that is known of Classical Greece in so far as it throws light upon Pausanias's *Description*. In notes drawn from innumerable writings in every language of travellers, scholars, and antiquaries Frazer throws light upon every aspect of Greek life—upon economics, as in the note on the Laurium silver mines, upon geography and topography, upon history and art, upon religion and mythology. In the course of a long criticism of the work in the *Classical Review* for 1898, Mr.

<sup>1</sup> The maps and plans illustrating this edition, along with apposite selections from the text, were reproduced in 1930 under the editorship of A. W. Van Buren as *Græcia Antiqua*, a volume intended as "a portable atlas for travellers following literally or in spirit in the footsteps of Pausanias." These maps, which were carefully prepared under the author's supervision, were superior to anything then available, and still hold their own with subsequent productions.

Percy Gardner compared it with Hitzig and Blümner's *Pausanias*, which appeared about the same time, and with Miss Harrison's *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*. "Miss Harrison's book has great merits; it is fresh and interesting and full of appreciation. But compared with it Mr. Frazer's shows far greater solidity of judgment, power of weighing evidence, breadth of view. When Mr. Frazer's work is placed beside that of his German predecessors his advantage is still more apparent. He speaks of the cities of Greece from closer personal acquaintance; and he is not only much wider in his studies, but he shows a clearer and surer judgment, and he is even a more complete master of the literature of the subject."

The passage of forty years, and the labours of archæologists during that period, have not left the work unscathed, for many sites untouched when the book was written have since been excavated. But to students the work will always have value as a repository of practically all that was known upon the subject up to 1896, and to the general reader the descriptions of scenery will always appeal, by reason of their charm and freshness. Several of these descriptions have been brought together and published as *Pausanias and other Greek Sketches*. (At the end of this volume is a sketch of the career of Pericles, originally written for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which is in its way a masterpiece.)

Two short extracts, one on Mount Hymettus, the other on the Fall of the Styx, will suffice to illustrate the skilful ease with which the author delineates the landscape of Greece.

“The outline of Hymettus, viewed from Athens, is even and regular; but its sides are furrowed by winter torrents and its base is broken into many small isolated hills of a conical form. Except towards its base the range is almost destitute of soil. Wild olives, myrtles, laurels, and oleanders are found only in some of the gullies at the foot of the mountain. Its steep rocky slopes are composed of grey marble seamed and cracked in all directions. Some stunted shrubs, however, including the lentisk, terebinth, and juniper, and sweet-smelling herbs, such as thyme, lavender, savory, and sage, grow in the clefts of the rocks, and, with flowers such as hyacinths and purple crocuses, furnish the bees with the food from which they still extract the famous Hymettian honey. Hymettus seems to have been as bare and treeless in classical antiquity as it is now; for Plato remarks that some of the Attic mountains, which now only provided food for bees, had at no very remote epoch furnished the timber with which some very large buildings were still roofed at the time when he wrote. The honey of Hymettus was renowned. It was said that when Plato was a babe the bees on Hymettus filled his mouth with honey.

“Hymettus was also famous in antiquity for its marble, which seems to have been especially prized by the Romans. This marble, which is still quarried in large quantities on Hymettus, is a bluish-grey streaky marble, of finer and closer grain than the white Pentelic marble, but far inferior to it in beauty. The Greeks seem not to have used it commonly till the third century B.C. From that time onward we find it employed for tombstones, inscriptions, and the casing of buildings.

“Clouds on Hymettus were believed to prognosticate rain; if during a storm a long bank of cloud was seen lowering on the mountain, it meant that the storm would increase in fury. Hymettus is still as of old remarkable for the wonderful purple glow which comes over it as seen from Athens by evening light. When the sun is setting, a rosy flush spreads over the whole mountain, which, as the daylight fades and the shadows creep up the slope, passes by insensible transitions through all intermediate shades of colour into the deepest violet. This purple tinge is peculiar to Hymettus; none of the other mountains which encircle the plain of Athens assumes it at any hour of the day. It was when the sunset glow was on Hymettus that Socrates drained the poisoned cup.”

And again : “As we advanced the glen grows wilder and more desolate, but for the first half-mile or so it is fairly open, the track keeps close

to the bed of the stream, and there is no particular difficulty. A deep glen now joins the glen of the Styx from the south-east. Here we begin to ascend the slope and cross an artificial channel which brings down water to the mill. All pretence of a path now ceases, and henceforward till we reach the foot of the waterfall there is nothing for it but to scramble over rocks and to creep along slopes often so steep and precipitous that to find a foothold or handhold on them is not easy, and stretching away into such depths below that it is best not to look down them but to keep the eyes fixed on the ground at one's feet. A stone set rolling down one of these slopes will be heard rumbling for a long time, and the sound is echoed and prolonged by the cliffs with such startling distinctness that at first it sounds as if a rock were coming thundering down upon the wayfarer from above. In the worst places the guides point out to the traveller where to plant his feet and hold him up if he begins to slip. Shrubs, tough grass, and here and there a stunted pine-tree give a welcome hold, but on the steepest slopes they are wanting.

“At the head of the last long slope of loose gravel we reach the foot of the waterfall. The water, as I have indicated, descends the smooth face of a huge cliff, said to be over six hundred feet high. It comes largely from the snowfields on the summit of Mount Chelmos, and hence

its volume varies with the season. When I visited the fall early in October, after the long drought of summer, the water merely trickled down in black streaks on the face of the cliffs, its presence being shown only by the glistening appearance which it communicated to the dark surface of the rock. At the foot of the cliff it formed a small stream, flowing down a very steep rocky bed into the bottom of the glen far below. The water was clear and not excessively cold. Even when, through the melting of the snows, the body of the water is considerable, it is said to be all dissolved into spray by falling through such a height and to reach the ground in the form of fine rain. Only the lower part of the cliff is visible from the foot of the waterfall, probably because the cliff overhangs somewhat. Certainly the cliffs a little to the right of the waterfall overhang considerably. With these enormous beetling crags of grey rock rising on three sides, the scene is one of sublime but wild and desolate grandeur."

The edition of Pausanias must always be considered Frazer's greatest work as a classical scholar. Next to it in importance is his edition of the *Fasti* of Ovid, which appeared in 1929.

The *Fasti* of Ovid is a poetical treatise on the Roman calendar, in which historical events, astronomical phenomena, and religious observances are recorded. The author's intention was

originally to supply a translation and illustrative notes, suitable for publication in the Loeb Library, but under his hand the material grew to such proportions that it ultimately appeared as five large volumes. The text is based on an original recension of six manuscripts, the translation is idiomatic and original, and the notes form a treatise on practically the whole of Roman history and mythology.

In the course of a long appreciation of it in the *Classical Review* Cyril Bailey wrote that the editor "has attacked his task with all his wonted vigour and thoroughness of method, and it provides scope for his scholarship and his archæology as well as for his wide-flung knowledge of anthropology. . . . To any student of Roman religion these volumes must for the future be a store-house of material, all the more valuable for the wide sweep from which its illustrations are drawn, and a fountain-head of new views, many of which are likely to be accepted. The achievement is one which could have been accomplished by no one but Sir James Frazer." The only edition of a Latin classic comparable to it produced in England in this generation is that of Manilius, which cost Prof. Housman the labours of thirty years.

A short extract from the preface to the *Fasti* will show that our author, at seventy-five, was still capable of the finest prose.

"No time could have been more appropriate

for the writing of a poem dedicated to the honour of Augustus and of Rome. For in these years Rome, enriched and embellished by many splendid monuments and stately palaces, which converted it from a city of brick into a city of marble, with peace and hope and triumph abroad, was at the very height of her power and glory: her sun had touched the zenith: the clouds had not yet begun to gather, the thunder to mutter, and the shadows to creep across the fair landscape. Apart from a few passing allusions to his own personal sorrow, which dim here and there for a moment the splendour of the picture, the poem of Ovid reflects the proud and serene confidence of the masters of the world in the stability and permanence of their empire and in the perpetuity of a long line of Cæsars yet to come. The gazettes of victory arriving from the Rhine and the Danube contained no warnings of the barbarian storm that was brewing in the North; and while Ovid was inditing the *Fasti* he could not dream that among the hills of Galilee the Man was already born who was destined to shake the Roman Empire to its foundations and to lay the whole fabric of ancient civilization in the dust."

Subsequently, in 1931, the text and translation of the *Fasti* did appear, as was at first intended, in the Loeb Library. In this there is a life of Ovid, a charming biographical sketch, which does not appear in the larger edition.



Already, in 1921, Frazer had translated the *Library* of Apollodorus for the Loeb series. Doubtless he was attracted to this work by its subject rather than its literary importance, for the *Library* is a summary of traditional Greek mythology. In addition to the translation, there are notes referring to the principal passages of other ancient writers where each particular story is told, and indicating in many cases the extent of agreement or divergence between Apollodorus and other authors.

Summing up his achievements in the field of classical study, it might be said that he has worthily upheld the highest ideals of scholarship and integrity of the past, as exemplified by men like Bentley and Porson and Jebb, all of his own college. But he has done more than that, for he has had greater success than any one man in breaking down those walls beyond which no classical scholar of a former age would dream of passing. By equating Greek with barbarian he has demonstrated how the customs and beliefs of the one throw light upon the mythology of the other; and how from both we may deduce something of the mental processes of early man, something of the most ancient and most precious of human legacies. Largely as the outcome of Frazer's work, it may fairly be assumed that in the future no one will take up the study of classical mythology without some knowledge of savage customs and of the comparative

method. And, of those who do take up that study, many will doubtless be attracted by the style and scholarship of the Pausanias and the Ovid, and, above all, of *The Golden Bough*.

## CHAPTER IV

### *FOLK-LORE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT*

IN the years that followed the appearance of *Pausanias* Frazer continued to labour unceasingly. The monumental *Totemism and Exogamy*, in four large volumes, came out in 1910, and was preceded and followed by other works on anthropology. Meanwhile *The Golden Bough* had grown from two to twelve volumes. But, besides pursuing his original studies so fully and to such good purpose, he had extended his interests and had followed his friend Robertson Smith, whose death in 1894 was a loss that Frazer has never ceased to feel and regret, into the region of Semitic religion. During the years that Europe was at war he lived in London, and we must picture him spending much of his time in the dim quiet of his chambers in Brick Court, deep in the study of the Hebrew Testament.

From earliest boyhood, as the outcome of his father's teaching and his own reading, the English Bible had been familiar to him, and again and again in his pages we have an echo of the prose of the Authorized Version. In 1895 he edited a volume of passages of the Bible

chosen for their literary beauty and interest. This has since gone through several editions, and has been widely influential in impressing the literary merits of the Authorized Version upon the mind of the last two generations. The same thing has been attempted several times since then, with varying measures of success ; but no one has yet written a Preface in which the charms of the Bible are so aptly put forth, or notes in which usages, legends, and literary merits are so ably discussed. We may quote part of the preface to the second edition.

“ Though many of us can no longer, like our fathers, find in its pages the solution of the dark, the inscrutable riddle of human existence, yet the volume must still be held sacred by all who reverence the high inspirations to which it gives utterance, and the pathetic associations with which the faith and piety of so many generations have invested the familiar words. The reading of it breaks into the dull round of common life like a shaft of sunlight on a cloudy day, or a strain of solemn music heard in a mean street. It seems to lift us for a while out of ourselves, our little cares and little sorrows, into communion with those higher powers, whatever they are, which existed before man began to be, and which will exist when the whole human race, as we are daily reminded by the cataclysms and convulsions of Nature, shall be swept out of existence for ever. It strengthens in us the

blind conviction, or the trembling hope, that somewhere, beyond these earthly shadows, there is a world of light eternal, where the obstinate questionings of the mind will be answered and the heart find rest."

The fruit of his labours in this new vineyard was given to the world in 1918 as *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament ; Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend, and Law*. In the Preface to the first of the three volumes the author defines both the general aims of anthropology and his own specific purpose in writing this book. "Modern researches into the early history of man, conducted on different lines, have converged with almost irresistible force on the conclusion that all civilized races have at some period or other emerged from a state of savagery resembling more or less closely the state in which many backward races have continued to the present time; and that, long after the majority of men in a community have ceased to think and act like savages, not a few traces of the old ruder modes of life and thought survive in the habits and institutions of the people. Such survivals are included under the head of folk-lore, which, in the broadest sense of the word, may be said to embrace the whole body of a people's traditional beliefs and customs, so far as these appear to be due to the collective action of the multitude and cannot be traced to the individual influence of great men. Despite the high moral

and religious development of the ancient Hebrews, there is no reason to suppose that they formed an exception to this general law. They, too, had probably passed through a stage of barbarism and even of savagery; and this probability, based on the analogy of other races, is confirmed by an examination of their literature, which contains many references to beliefs and practices which can hardly be explained except on the supposition that they are rudimentary survivals from a far lower level of culture. It is to the illustration and explanation of a few such relics of ruder times, as they are preserved like fossils in the Old Testament, that I have addressed myself in the present work."

The first chapter is concerned with the account, or rather the two contradictory accounts, of the creation of man in Genesis. Similar beliefs in man's first appearance on earth appear widely diffused among primitive people, for similar stories can be traced in the ancient folk-lore of Babylonia, Egypt, and Greece, among the Australians, the Maoris, and the Tahitians of to-day—and in fact in widely different and distant parts of the globe. On the other hand, many savages, especially totemic tribes who imagine that their ancestors sprang from their totemic animals or plants, believe that man was not created but evolved out of lower forms of animal life. Some Californian Indians are convinced that they are descended from coyotes, and parallel instances

are numerous in America, Africa, India, and Australasia. Hence the theories of creation and evolution, which in some measure still divide the civilized world, have also divided, during untold ages, the allegiances of primitive men.

In the succeeding chapters further incidents are similarly discussed—the Fall of Man, the Mark of Cain, the Great Flood, and so on. The chapter on the Great Flood (part of which was originally delivered as the annual Huxley lecture before the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1916) is outstanding even among the rest for its wealth of erudition and illustration. It runs to 250 pages, and contains numerous stories of great floods from the folk-lore of the Babylonians, the Hebrews, Ancient Greeks, and other Europeans, ancient and modern Indians, eastern Asiatics, Polynesians, South, Central, and North Americans. Another chapter, on the heirship of Jacob, is devoted to a consideration of the law or custom known as junior-right or ultimogeniture in contrast to primogeniture, because it gives the inheritance to the youngest son instead of to the eldest. In the course of it we have a long digression upon ultimogeniture and *Jus primæ Noctis*. By this law it was commonly believed that under the feudal system a landlord was permitted to deflower the virgin brides of his tenants—a belief originally derived from a statement by Hector Boece, the Scottish historian, and frequently repeated down to our

own day. In a disquisition which is a masterpiece of reasoning and judgment, the author shows that this fable has arisen from a misunderstanding of the term *marchet* or *merchet*. This term denoted a fine paid to the lord by a tenant on the marriage of his daughter; but the notion became current in the sixteenth century that the *marchet* or *merchet* was a pecuniary commutation for a former right claimed by a feudal lord of sleeping with his vassal's daughter on their wedding night.

This misunderstanding, which prevailed upon the continent of Europe as widely as in Britain, was strengthened by the fact that there was, during the Middle Ages, a custom generally termed the *jus primæ noctis*. By a decree of the early Christian Church it was enacted that "when the bridegroom and bride have received the benediction, let them remain that same night in a state of virginity out of reverence for the benediction." And by subsequent enactments this period of chastity was extended from one to two or three nights, upon the example of Tobias, in the apocryphal *Book of Tobit*. In time the clergy judged it expedient to mitigate the canon, and accordingly withdrew their prohibitions in the cases of husbands who paid a moderate fee. This was the true *jus primæ noctis*.

The custom of observing "Tobias nights," as it is called, has survived among many peasant



communities in Europe down to fairly recent times. On the other hand, the practice of continence for some time after marriage is older than Christianity, and has been observed by many heathen tribes: far from instituting the rule and imposing it on its pagans, the Church, on the contrary, borrowed it from the heathen and sought to give it a scriptural sanction by appealing to the example of Tobias.

"In these customs," we read, "it deserves to be noticed that men and women are often employed as attendants on the bride and bridegroom for the express purpose of preventing the speedy consummation of marriage. The frequency of the practice suggests that this may have been the original function of bridesmen and bridesmaids in Europe generally, as it still is among some of the South Slavs."

Originally the practice of continence after marriage was probably based on a fear of the demons who are commonly supposed to lie in wait for the newly married. Among many primitive tribes special precautions are taken against demons at the time of a marriage.

With Jacob, to whom many illuminating pages are devoted, we leave the patriarchal age, and take up the story of Moses. Moses's exposure among the bulrushes and his preservation have many parallels, for similar traditions have come down to us of Semiramus, of Gilgamesh, of Cyrus, of Perseus, of Telephus, of Ægisthus,

of Œdipus, of Romulus, and of Sargon, King of Babylon. Hence the story of the infant Moses can hardly be regarded as an actual incident, but rather as a piece of folk-lore, such as has attached itself to the early history of many famous persons. It has been conjectured that in such stories we have a reminiscence of an old custom of testing the legitimacy of children by throwing them into the water and leaving them to sink or swim, those which swam being accepted as legitimate. "The Biblical narrative of the birth of Moses drops no hint that his legitimacy was doubtful, but when we remember that his father Amram married his paternal aunt, that Moses was the offspring of the marriage, and that later Jewish law condemned all such marriages as incestuous, we may perhaps, without being uncharitable, suspect that in the original form of the story the mother of Moses had a more particular reason for exposing her babe on the water than a general command of Pharaoh to cast all male children of the Hebrews into the river."

It seems not impossible that our author is in error here : "In discussing the story of Moses in the bulrush ark it is observed that as the father of Moses married his aunt (Exod. vi, 20), and unions of this kind are condemned as incestuous in Lev. xviii, 12, the mother of Moses may have had a more particular reason for thus treating her child than Pharaoh's command to throw all

male Hebrew infants into the river. The early narrative in Exod. ii does not name Moses's parents. They appear for the first time in a secondary stratum of the Priestly Code. What authority the writer followed we do not know. The father of Moses, Amram, is represented as a grandson of Levi. In Exod. ii his mother is described as a 'daughter of Levi'—i.e., a woman of the tribe. The would-be genealogist, taking the term literally, united Amram in the second generation to Jochebed in the first. But to employ this relationship to convey an imputation is to confuse the data of documents that are centuries apart." (J. E. Estlin Carpenter, reviewing the work in the *Hibbert Journal* for July, 1919.)

The passage of the children of Israel through the Red Sea is also not without parallel, for Alexander the Great and his army marched through the Pamphylian Sea on his expeditions against Darius, and under Scipio the Elder a Roman storming party marched through a lagoon in attacking New Carthage during the second Carthaginian War. Certain African tribes also retain traditions of miraculous passages through a lake or river. Similarly, Moses' achievement of producing water from a rock by smiting it with his staff has a parallel among the natives of Central Celebes, for they tell how an ancient there produced water from a rock by smiting it with his spear.

In general the qualities that distinguish *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* are the qualities that make *The Golden Bough* the great work that it is. But *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* gives evidence of a further gift which the author has formerly had little scope to display—namely, an aptitude for delineating character. Here, for example, Jacob is set vividly before us: “The character of this great ancestor, as it is portrayed for us in Genesis, has little to attract or please a modern reader, and it contrasts unfavourably both with the calm dignity of his grandfather Abraham and with the meditative piety of his father Isaac. If Abraham is the type of the Semitic sheikh, brave and hospitable, dignified and courteous, Jacob is the type of the Semitic leader, supple and acute, fertile in expedients, with a keen eye to gain, compassing his ends not by force but by craft, and not too scrupulous in the choice of means by which to outwit and overreach his rivals and competitors. This unamiable combination of cupidity and cunning reveals itself in the earliest recorded incidents of the patriarch’s life, the devices by which he contrived to cheat his elder brother Esau out of his birth-right and his father’s blessing.”

We have another fine character study when we come to the chapter on Samson and Delilah. “Among the grave judges of Israel the burly hero Samson cuts a strange figure. That he judged Israel for twenty years we are indeed

informed by the sacred writer, but of the judgments which he delivered in his judicial character not one has been recorded, and if the tenor of his pronouncements can be inferred from the nature of his acts, we may be allowed to doubt whether he particularly adorned the bench of justice. His talent would seem to have lain rather in the direction of brawling and fighting, burning down people's corn-ricks, and beating up the quarters of loose women; in short, he appears to have shone in the character of a libertine and a rake-hell rather than in a strictly judicial capacity. Instead of a dull list of his legal decisions we are treated to an amusing, if not very edifying, narrative of his adventures in love and in war, or rather in filibustering; for if we accept, as we are bound to do, the scriptural account of this roystering swashbuckler, he never levied a regular war or headed a national insurrection against the Philistines, the oppressors of his people; he merely sallied forth from time to time as a solitary paladin or knight-errant, and mowed them down with the jawbone of an ass or any other equally serviceable weapon that came to his hand. And even on these predatory expeditions (for he had no scruple about relieving his victims of their clothes and probably of their purses) the idea of delivering his nation from servitude was to all appearances the last thing that would have occurred to him. If he massacred the Philistines, as he certainly did in

great profusion and with hearty good will, it was from no high motive of patriotism or policy, but purely from a personal grudge which he bore them for the wrongs which they had done to himself, to his wife, and to his father-in-law. From first to last his story is that of an utterly selfish and unscrupulous adventurer, swayed by gusts of fitful passion and indifferent to everything but the gratification of his momentary whims. It is only redeemed from the staleness and vulgarity of commonplace rascality by the elements of supernatural strength, headlong valour, and a certain grim humour which together elevate it into a sort of burlesque epic after the manner of Ariosto. But these features, while they lend piquancy to the tale of his exploits, hardly lessen the sense of incongruity which we experience on coming across the grotesque figure of this swaggering, hectoring bully side by side with the solemn effigies of saints and heroes in the Pantheon of Israel's history. The truth seems to be that in the extravagance of its colouring the picture of Samson owes more to the brush of the storyteller than to the pen of the historian. The marvellous and diverting incidents of his disreputable career probably floated about loosely as popular tales on the current of oral tradition long before they crystallized around the memory of a real man, a doughty highlander and borderer, a sort of Hebrew Rob Roy, whose

choleric temper, dauntless courage, and prodigious bodily strength marked him out as the champion of Israel in many a wild foray across the border into the rich lowlands of Philistia. For there is no sufficient reason to doubt that a firm basis of fact underlies the flimsy and transparent superstructure of fancy in the Samson saga. The particularity with which the scenes of his life, from birth to death, are laid in definite towns and places, speaks strongly in favour of a genuine local tradition, and as strongly against the theory of a solar myth, into which some writers would dissolve the story of the brawny hero."

Of Saul too we have a striking portrait. "His tall and stately form, his gallant bearing, his skilful generalship and dauntless courage on the field of battle, all marked him out as a natural leader of men. Yet, under a showy exterior, this dashing and popular soldier concealed some fatal infirmities—a jealous and suspicious disposition, a choleric temper, a weakness of will, a vacillation of purpose, and, above all, a brooding melancholy under which his intellect, never of a high order, sometimes trembled on the verge of insanity. In such dark hours the profound dejection which clouded his brain could only be lightened and dispelled by the soothing strains of solemn music; and one of the most graphic pictures painted for us by the Hebrew historian is that of the handsome

king sitting sunk in gloom, while the minstrel boy, the ruddy-cheeked David, stood before him discoursing sweet music on the trembling strings of the harp, till the frown passed from the royal brow and the sufferer found a truce to his uneasy thoughts."

Part IV, which is dedicated to the Jewish Law, is prefaced by a general consideration of the place of the Law in Jewish history. Linguistic and historical criticism have demonstrated fairly conclusively that the legislation of the Pentateuch, in the form in which we now possess it, cannot have been promulgated by Moses in the desert, but belongs to a much later date, after the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. "But it is necessary to distinguish carefully between the age of the laws themselves and the dates when they were first given to the world in the shape of written codes. A very little thought will satisfy us that laws in general do not spring cap-à-pie into existence like Athena from the head of Zeus, at the moment when they are codified. Legislation and codification are two very different things. Legislation is the authoritative enactment of certain rules of conduct which have either not been observed or have not been legally binding before the acts empowering them were passed by the supreme authority. . . . Only a law which in some measure answers to a people's past has any power to mould that



people's future. To reconstruct human society from the foundations upward is a visionary enterprise, harmless enough as long as it is confined to the Utopias of philosophic dreamers, but dangerous and possibly disastrous when it is attempted in practice by men, whether demagogues or despots, who by the very attempt prove their ignorance of the fundamental principles of the problem they rashly set themselves to solve." Many of the Hebrew laws are far more ancient than the date when they were codified; such customs, for example, as circumcision, the ceremonial uncleanness of women, and the employment of scapegoats have their analogies in the customs of savage tribes in many parts of the world, and were doubtless observed by the early Semites long before they were enjoined by law.

On the other hand, our author is not one of those who regard Moses as a mere mythical personage, a creation of popular or priestly fancy. "Any such inference," he says, "would do violence, not only to the particular evidence which speaks in favour of the historical reality of Moses, but the general laws of probability; for great religions and national movements seldom or never occur except under the driving force of great men. The origin of Israel and Judaism without Moses would be hardly more intelligible than the origin of Buddhism without Buddha, the origin of Christianity without

Christ, or the origin of Mohammedanism without Mohammed. . . . The multitude needs a leader, and without him, though it possesses a great faculty of destruction, it possesses little or none of construction. Without men great in thought, in word, in action, and in their influence over their fellows, no great nation ever was or ever will be built up. Moses was such a man, and he may justly rank as the real founder of Israel."

In a paragraph ripe in wisdom and learning the author outlines the consequences of the codification of Hebrew law.

"The publication of the Deuteronomic Code in written form marked an era in the history not only of the Jewish people but of humanity. It was the first step towards the canonization of Scripture and thereby to the substitution of the written for the spoken word as the supreme and infallible rule of conduct. The accomplishment of the process by the completion of the Canon in the succeeding centuries laid thought under shackles from which in the western world it has never since succeeded in wholly emancipating itself. The spoken word before was free, and therefore thought was free, since speech is nothing but thought made vocal and articulate. The prophets enjoyed full freedom both of thought and of speech, because their thoughts and words were believed to be inspired by the deity. Even the priests were far from being hidebound by tradition; though God was not

supposed to speak by their lips, they no doubt allowed themselves considerable latitude in working the oracular machinery of lots and other mechanical devices through which the deity vouchsafed to manifest his will to anxious inquirers. But when once the oracles were committed to writing they were stereotyped and invariable; from the fluid they had solidified into the crystalline form with all its hardness and durability; a living growth had been replaced by a dead letter; the scribe had ousted the prophet and even the priest, so far as the functions of the priest were oracular and not sacrificial. Henceforth Israel became the 'people of the book'; the highest wisdom and knowledge were to be obtained not by independent observation, not by the free investigation of man and of nature, but by the servile interpretation of a written record. The author must make room for the commentator; the national genius, which had created the Bible, accommodated itself to the task of writing the Talmud."

*Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* attracted a good deal of attention upon its appearance, for its subject was of general interest, and its author had already attained an outstanding position in the world of thought. The *Times Literary Supplement* devoted a leading article to it in which the reviewer described it as "a mine of instructive facts for which all future students of the subject will be grateful." The *New States-*

man, in its review, said that "the time has gone by when the work of the latest historian of the Roman Empire could both gain the approval of scholars and lie on ladies' dressing-tables. But Sir James Frazer, than whom no scholar is more erudite or severe in his industry, has the eighteenth-century gift of presenting the latest achievement of research in a form in which it may be read by the ordinary man for its own sake. *The Golden Bough* has been so read from its first appearance, and the faithful have followed it with increasing enjoyment through all its transmutations. *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* has the same interest and the same charm. It does not address itself merely to anthropological scholars. Nothing more is required for its satisfactory appreciation than curiosity as to the workings of the human spirit and a love of the scholarly temperament and of scholarly prose." These are typical of many enthusiastic reviews.

Even periodicals devoted to the interests of orthodox religion joined, with reservations, in the chorus of praise. Arthur C. Headlam in the *Church Quarterly Review* for April, 1919, described it as a work of "immense and varied learning, presented in a style of great dignity and lucidity." In *Theology* for November, 1920, P. H. Ditchfield wrote of it as "a very remarkable book, showing amazing industry and varied learning, dealing with the interpretation of the

Bible." In a way these words of praise are important, for they show that the time when Renan would be attacked as "anti-Christ" and Robertson Smith deprived of his chair on a charge of heresy was passing, and that the attitude of dogmatic intolerance was giving way to a more enlightened outlook. An important factor in bringing about that desirable effect has been the disinterested industry and unquestioned integrity of James George Frazer.

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL WORKS

FRAZER'S first work on anthropology was *Totemism*, a slim volume of less than a hundred pages, published in 1887, which grew out of the article on the same subject written for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. When he decided to reprint this volume he included with it some essays, originally contributed to the *Fortnightly Review*, in which he discussed the important discoveries of Spencer and Gillen among the aborigines of Central Australia, and the new light they threw upon the whole subject of totemism. But since his first essay on totemism was written fresh evidence had been produced from other parts of the world, and in taking account of this he was led into writing an *Ethnographic Survey of Totemism*, which forms a complete digest of what was known about totemism and exogamy at the time it was written. Finally the author discussed the place which the institutions occupy in the history of society, and the theories that have been suggested to account for their origin. So that when *Totemism and Exogamy* came to be published in 1910 it appeared as four stout volumes.

Totemism was first discovered by the Scotsman, John Ferguson McLennan. A totem, as defined in *Totemism and Exogamy*, "is a class of material objects which a savage regards with superstitious respect, believing that there exists between him and every member of the class an intimate and altogether special relation. . . . The connection between a man and his totem is mutually beneficent: the totem protects the man, and the man shows his respect for the totem in various ways, by not killing it if it be an animal, and not cutting into or gathering it if it be a plant. As distinguished from a fetich, a totem is never an isolated individual, but always a class of objects, generally a species of animals or of plants, more rarely a class of inanimate natural objects, very rarely a class of artificial objects."

"It is a common, indeed general, rule that members of a totemic clan may not marry each other but are bound to seek their wives and husbands in another clan. This rule is called exogamy." The two institutions of totemism and exogamy are generally found together; but there are exceptions, for some people are exogamous without being totemic.

Totemism, it may be noted, is peculiar to the dark-skinned and least civilized races of mankind, which occupy the Tropics, the Southern Hemisphere, and North America. Some investigators would have us see traces

of totemism in classical Greece and in ancient Ireland, but in Frazer's opinion no case of totemism has been proved in any Aryan people. Nor would he subscribe to the views of Robertson Smith, that totemism existed among the Semitic peoples.

In discussing the origin of totemism the author outlines several theories that have been propounded, such as Herbert Spencer's, that totemism originated in a misinterpretation of nicknames, and Wilken's, that it arose from the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, and Dr. Haddon's, that totems were originally the animals or plants on which local groups of people chiefly subsisted and after which they were named by their neighbours. The author then outlines two hypotheses which he had once held and now abandoned: firstly, that totemism originated in the doctrine of the external soul or the supposed possibility of depositing the souls of living people for safety in external objects, such as animals or plants; and, secondly, that totemism originated as a system of magic designed to supply a community with the necessities of life. Finally we have the author's third theory (to which he still inclines, though on this, as on most matters of theory, he is ever ready to reconsider his verdict) that totemism originated in a primitive explanation of conception and child-birth. For the aborigines of Australia, as Spencer and



Gillen discovered, were quite ignorant of the facts of paternity, and attributed the conception of children to the agency of plants and animals. Such ignorance must at one time have been universal among men, and has since been discovered by Prof. Malinowski among the Trobriand Islanders, and the totemic theory of conception and child-birth is one which would naturally suggest itself to the mind of the savage; in particular it would find support in the common fancies of pregnant women.

Exogamy and totemism, though commonly found together, are distinct institutions, and must have originated separately. According to McLennan, exogamism arose through a scarcity of women caused by female infanticide, which obliged men to steal wives from other groups and so gradually established a prejudice in favour of marriage with foreign women. Dr. Westermarck, on the other hand, holds that exogamy originated in a natural aversion to sexual intercourse between persons who have been brought up together. The theory favoured by our author is that of L. H. Morgan. According to this theory, exogamy was introduced to prevent the marriage or cohabitation of blood relations, especially of brothers with sisters, which had been common in a former state of sexual promiscuity. The aversion to such marriages of near kin, which must have existed long before it was embodied

in an exogamous rule, shows itself in the widespread customs of avoidance which are observed by certain marriageable persons towards each other.

We cannot say why savages abhorred and prohibited incest and the marriage of near kin. It is possible that exogamy sprang from a belief in the sterilizing effect of incest upon women, animals, and plants. And indeed it seems that infertility is a necessary consequence of long-continued inbreeding under the same conditions, so that in the exogamous rule we have an accidental and superstitious anticipation of scientific knowledge.

Superstition, it may be noted, is not always to be condemned, and in a lecture originally delivered before the Royal Institution in London, and published first as *Psyche's Task* (1909) and later as *The Devil's Advocate* (1927), Frazer issued a powerful plea for it by demonstrating, with copious illustrations, that among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect, firstly for government, especially monarchical government, and has thereby contributed to the establishment and maintenance of civil order; secondly, for private property, and has thereby contributed to the security of individual possession; thirdly, for marriage, and has thereby contributed to a stricter observance of the rules of sexual morality both among the married and the un-

married; and, lastly, for human life, and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment.

Though he devoted so much time and labour to the study of totemism, Frazer was never inclined to over-estimate its significance as a factor in human history. In one place he writes: "As a matter of fact the influence which it is supposed to have exercised on economic progress appears to be little more than a shadowy conjecture; and, though its influence on religion has been real, it has been greatly exaggerated. By comparison with some other factors, such as the worship of Nature and the worship of the dead, the importance of totemism in religious evolution is altogether subordinate." To these other factors he now turned his attention to good purpose.

In 1913 appeared the first part of *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead*. In this volume, which comprises the Gifford Lectures delivered at St. Andrews in 1911-12, the author deals with the belief among the aborigines of Australia and the natives of the Torres Straits Islands, New Guinea, and Melanesia. As is his custom, he prefaces the work with a lucid discussion of the whole subject. "Of the many forms which natural religion has assumed [we read] none probably has exerted so deep and far-reaching an influence on human life as the belief in immortality and

the worship of the dead; hence an historical survey of this most momentous creed and of the practical consequences which have been deduced from it can hardly fail to be at once instructive and impressive, whether we regard the record with complacency as a noble testimony to the aspiring genius of man, who claims to outlive the sun and the stars, or whether we view it with pity as a melancholy monument of fruitless labour and barren ingenuity expended in prying into that great mystery of which fools profess their knowledge and wise men confess their ignorance."

"The savage," he notes in his introductory chapter, "draws his ideas of natural causation from observation of himself. Hence he explains the phenomena of nature by supposing that they are produced by beings like himself. These beings may be called spirits or gods of Nature to distinguish them from living human gods.

"In time men reject polytheism as an explanation of natural processes and substitute certain abstract ideas of ethers, atoms, molecules, and so on. But, while they commonly discard the hypothesis of a deity as an explanation of all the particular processes of nature, they retain it as an explanation of Nature in general."

Having traced the belief in immortality as held by the aborigines of Australia and the

natives of the Torres Straits Islands, New Guinea, and Melanesia in his first volume, he passes in his second volume, published in 1922, to the belief among the Polynesians, and in his third, published in 1924, to the belief among the Micronesians. These volumes, it may be noted, have been conceived and written upon a spacious plan, and besides dealing at great length with the immediate subject of the belief in immortality they give an immense amount of knowledge about the people and districts they discuss.

Of *The Worship of Nature* only one volume has been published (in 1926). The general thesis of the work is that a very large part of religion, at least in its earlier phases, is based on direct personification of Nature. Firstly the author traces the worship of the sky, as it is found among the Vedic Indians, the Greeks and Romans, the ancient Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians, the civilized people of China, Corea, and Assam, and the natives of Africa. Then he deals in a similar way with the worship of the earth and the sun. In his preface he declares his intention of completing his survey of the worship of the sun, and of dealing with the personification and worship of other aspects of Nature, both inanimate and animate, but the pressure of other work has prevented the completion of these labours. Even as it stands, however, in its incomplete

state, this is one of the most significant of his works, by reason of its intensely important subject.

In the Introduction he dwells for a moment upon the tendency of man's thoughts. "The mind of man refuses to acquiesce in the phenomena of sense. By an instinctive, an irresistible impulse it is driven to seek for something beyond, something which it assumes to be more real and abiding than the shifting phantasmagoria of this sensible world. This search and this assumption are not peculiar to philosophers; they are shared in varying degrees by every man and woman born into the world."

In a footnote rich in humour he divulges his own opinion of certain recent scientific theory (which, however, is more generally accepted to-day than it was in 1926): "In speaking so glibly of infinities, as I have done in the text, I should mention that at the present time several scientific gentlemen are engaged in reconstructing the universe on a new and improved pattern of finite dimensions. Indeed, two of these reconstructions are now complete and ready for delivery. But as the two differ fundamentally from each other, and the value of both seems dubious, the unscientific laity may perhaps be pardoned for temporarily acquiescing in the old-fashioned infinities and in the antiquated notion of a radical distinction

between space and time. . . . Even Einstein, it appears, after ejecting absolute space and time by the front door, has smuggled them in by the back—a melancholy backsliding which deals a staggering blow to the reconstructed universe and encourages the profane to indulge in a chimerical hope of the continued existence and sanity of both space and time.”

Having dealt with the belief in immortality and the worship of Nature, Frazer turned to that other great factor in early human thought, the fear of the dead. In 1932–33 he delivered a series of lectures on the subject at Trinity College, Cambridge, consonant with the terms of a Foundation left to the college by his friend William Wyse. These lectures were published in book form in 1933 as *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*. The author has since gone over the ground in greater detail, and two further volumes have now appeared, bringing the work to a conclusion. An extract from the first lecture illustrates his view of the subject.

“Men commonly believe that their conscious being will not end at death, but that it will be continued for an indefinite time or for ever, long after the frail corporeal envelope which lodged it for a time has mouldered in the dust. This belief in the immortality of the soul, as we call it, is by no means confined to the adherents of those great historical religions

which are now professed by the most civilized nations of the world; it is held with at least equal confidence by most, if not all, of those peoples of lower culture whom we call savages or barbarians, and there is every reason to think that among them the belief is native; in other words, that it originated among them in a stage of savagery at least as low as that which they now occupy, and that it has been handed down among them from generation to generation without being materially modified by contact with races at higher levels of culture. It is therefore a mistake to suppose that the hope of immortality after death was first revealed to mankind by the founders of the great historical religions, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam: to all appearances, it was cherished by men all over the world thousands of years before Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Mohammed were born."

In 1936 the third volume of *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion* was published, in which the author brought his treatment of the subject to a conclusion.

In the same year he carried out a project he had long entertained by writing *Aftermath: a Supplement to the Golden Bough*. In the main the book is a collection of information on matters he had discussed in *The Golden Bough* which he had met with since writing that work. It contains no modification of the theories he



originally propounded: on the other hand he adduces some further support that in some cases is quite striking. Thus, for example, in *The Golden Bough* he deduced a primitive belief in an external soul from a certain type of folk-tales: in *Aftermath* he quotes definite evidence of such belief among different African tribes.

These, then, are Frazer's main anthropological works: a number of his shorter papers on the subject have been brought together in his volume called *Garnered Sheaves*.

To estimate the importance of Frazer's labours to the anthropological world would be a difficult and dangerous task; but there are certain fairly obvious observations which may be made:

His greatest benefit to anthropology, of course, is that by his writings (like Andrew Lang before him, though to better purpose) he has aroused a general public interest in the subject, and has attracted many scholars to take up the study of it.

"There is probably no man who has done more to make the whole European world conscious of the importance of the world outside the public school and University than Sir James George Frazer. By the vast amount of his evidence and the beauty of his style, he has made even governments aware of the interest and value of studying the peoples of their Empire, so that now some sort of anthropological training is usually considered desir-

able or even necessary for those who have any part in the administration of the Colonies.” (T. K. Penniman, *A Hundred Years of Anthropology*.)

He has taken more of knowledge for his province, and has made it more thoroughly his own, than any other worker in the field. As a consequence further investigators need rarely go back beyond Frazer in those departments with which he has dealt. Apart from facts discovered subsequent to the publication of his volumes on totemism and exogamy, for example, practically all the available material is to be found in his great work. So too, though in a lesser degree, with the worship of Nature and the belief in immortality.

Anthropologists have long known that primitive people worshipped Nature, and that they believed in some form of life after death, but it remained for Frazer to define and illustrate those beliefs, and to show how they have modified the thoughts and actions of men in all ages, and down to our own times. There are, of course, whole branches of the study which Frazer has never approached; but even to workers in those branches his industry and integrity must always be an inspiration, an ideal.

Frazer's example has had a further beneficial effect upon anthropological studies, for it is (I think) largely due to his influence that anthro-

pologists as a rule write readable prose, and do not, like many investigators in other branches of science, hide their meaning in technical jargon.

I am not foolish enough to pretend that Frazer's work in anthropology has gone unchallenged by later writers. When Frazer wrote he had to use what evidence he could get from the primitive races of mankind. Some of the peoples which he cited have since been investigated more closely by trained anthropologists, and the deductions he has drawn from them must be re-examined in the light of fresh knowledge.

We have seen, too, that he attributes the occurrence of similar beliefs in different parts of the globe to "the essential similarity in the working of the less developed human mind among all races." In this he shared the outlook of his great teacher Tylor. Another school of anthropologists lays emphasis upon historical rather than psychological factors, and seeks to explain similar beliefs by their diffusion from a single centre. The leaders of the "diffusionist" school, Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry, find the origin of all culture in Egypt, and Perry especially has been industrious and ingenious in proving his case. Sir James does not deny diffusion. "No one pretends," I have heard him say, "that Christianity originated in Scotland: it reached there by diffusion." Yet

there is no doubt that his generalizations are built upon a psychological rather than an historical basis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the best, certainly the most readable, discussion of the Uniformity School as represented by Frazer, and the Diffusionist School as represented by Elliot Smith and Perry, is given by Toynbee as an appendix (or Annex, as he chooses to call it) to the first volume of his great work, *A Study of History*.

## CHAPTER VI

### LITERARY STUDIES

IN a life devoted to the intensive study of anthropology, Frazer has sought recreation in the pleasant highways of literature—an invaluable habit, which by keeping the achievements of others before him in the writing of English prose has inevitably sustained him in making his own style rhythmical, colourful, and precise. A number of articles and translations in prose and verse, the outcome of his leisure hours, have appeared, and are conveniently brought together in *The Gorgon's Head* (1927). That book takes its title from a story, "The Quest of the Gorgon's Head"—probably the only piece of fiction that Frazer ever wrote.

Frazer's favourite English poet has always been Cowper, and in 1912 he edited the *Letters of William Cowper*, a selection in two volumes, to which he prefixed a sketch of the author's life. This biographical sketch is a perfect thing of its kind. In it he traces the life of the poet, with its happy lights and dismal shadows, portraying intimately and sympathetically the people whom Cowper knew and the places where he lived. And when the biographer speaks

feelingly of the pleasures of a tranquil, industrious life, enlivened by country walks and by the friendship of congenial spirits, it is not difficult to divine that these have been the most abiding pleasures of his own life. A short extract from this sketch will illustrate the charmingly intimate manner—so suitable in treating of Cowper—in which it is written.

“The summer of 1781, when Cowper was busy with his poetical labours and the correction of the press, was very hot: the fields languished and the upland grass was burnt. In order to procure some coolness and shade in the garden, where the heat reflected from the walls and the gravel seemed like that of Africa, Cowper converted a small greenhouse into a summer parlour. The walls were hung with mats, the floor covered with a carpet, and the sun for the most part excluded by an awning; and in this pleasant nook, with myrtles looking in at the window, and a prospect of rows of pinks and beans, of carnations and roses blooming in the sunshine outside, the poet and his friends passed the heat of the day in happy converse or contented silence, while the rustling of the wind in the trees, the singing of birds, and the hum of bees in a bed of mignonette made music in their ears.”

Three years later, in 1915, Frazer edited a selection of the Essays of Joseph Addison. By way of a preface he wrote a description of a

purely imaginary visit to Coverley Hall. Here are two paragraphs from it.

“I have slept in the haunted chamber which was shut up when Sir Roger took possession of the Hall, and which he caused to be exorcized by his chaplain. To judge by experience, the exorcism was effectual; for, though I lay long awake, I saw nothing more ghostly than the dance of shadows cast by the firelight on the ceiling (the evening being damp and chilly, they had lighted a bright fire on the hearth), and heard nothing more blood-curdling than the tick of a death-watch behind the black wainscot, the croaking of frogs in the lily-lake under my window, and the hooting of owls in the elms. With these sounds in my ears I fell asleep, and slept as sweetly as ever I did in my life, till a sunbeam stealing through a chink in the shutters woke me, and I sat up wondering where I was.

“Before I quit the Hall I will only add that, sitting in the great oriel, where the arms of the Coverleys are blazoned on the panes, I chanced to take up an old volume that was lying on the window seat. What was my joy to find it to be *Baker's Chronicle*, the very copy that Sir Roger was wont to peruse, sitting in his high armchair by the great fireplace of the hall after a hard day's hunting! I almost thought I could recognize the old knight's thumb-marks on some of the yellow dog-eared leaves. I fancy he must have nodded over some of these same

pages and wakened with a start, when the ponderous volume fell with a crash to the floor."

Naturally enough, some readers who knew Frazer only as the author of scientific treatises took this for an actual account of a visit to Coverley Hall. At least one reader applied to the British Museum for aid in tracing the sources from which he had drawn his account of the family, and, failing to get satisfaction there, appealed to the author.

Frazer showed his mastery of Addison's style by writing several essays in the manner of the famous Spectator essays: these are published together in *The Gorgon's Head*, which contains most of his purely literary pieces. In point of style it is very difficult to say whether anyone could without foreknowledge, distinguish one of these pastiches from an original Spectator essay. In one paper, "Sir Roger in Cambridge," he takes the knight to his own beloved college of Trinity—"a spacious enough court it was, I am free to admit, with a great expanse of grass, a fountain playing among flower-beds in the centre, the hall with its tall oriel on the opposite side, and the chapel with its long line of buttresses on our right"—and there introduces him to the learned and pugnacious Master, Bentley, who upon this occasion, however, was gracious enough.

"The room was empty, and we had to wait a few minutes. Then we heard voices approach-



ing, the door opened, and the Master stood before us, a tall, burly figure in cap and gown. Behind him trotted a little man of deferential manners, whom the Master introduced to us as the Vice-Master, Mr. Walker, and to whom he handed his cap. 'Sir Roger,' said the Master, 'I am glad to make your acquaintance. On my journeys to Worcester, where my duties as prebendary take me for two months every summer, I have often passed your gates.' 'Then I hope, sir,' interposed Sir Roger, 'that the next time you come down you will do me the honour of paying a visit to the Hall.' 'I shall be happy to do so, sir,' replied the Master, with great suavity; 'I shall be very happy to do so. Sir Roger, you have a good name in the county as a staunch Churchman and a loyal subject. In these days of atheism and sedition—I leave you, sir, as a layman to apply the appropriate epithets to those pests of our time—I say, sir, in these days of sedition and atheism, it is a pleasure to make the acquaintance of a gentleman of such sound principles. I shall be happy to visit you at Coverley.' "

Some years later Frazer returned to the study of Addison, and in January, 1922, published an essay on "London Life in the Time of Addison" in the *Quarterly Review*. This is reprinted in enlarged form in *The Gorgon's Head*. It is an exceedingly clever sketch of life in the Metropolis, drawn from the pages of the *Spectator* and of the

*Tatler*, from Spence's *Anecdotes*, from Evelyn's *Diary*, and from such-like sources. We may indicate the pleasantly intimate tone of it by quoting a paragraph.

"More than once Addison refers to the smoke of London, but not in such a way as to indicate that he suffered any inconvenience from it. He says that for forty years Will Honeycomb had not passed a month out of the smoke of London, and he refers sarcastically to ladies who affected foreign fopperies without having ever lived outside the smoke of London or even the parish of St. James's. A very different attitude towards the nuisance was taken by Addison's older, but less robust, contemporary, the illustrious philosopher John Locke. Soon after his return from Holland, where he seems to have found the air not unsuitable to his delicate frame, he complained to his Dutch friend Limborch of the injury inflicted on his health by 'the pestilent smoke' of London. A few years later, driven from London by the fogs and smoke of the great city, he took up his abode at the manor-house of Oates, situated in a pleasant pastoral district of Essex about twenty miles from the capital, where he spent the evening of his life in happy seclusion with his fast friends the Mashams. What a London fog could be like in those days we learn from Evelyn's description of one which descended like a pall on the city in November, 1699. People lost their way in it; torches or

candles afforded little or no illumination. Lights were fixed on both sides of the road from London to Kensington, robberies were committed between the very lights, while coaches and travelers were passing. On the banks of the Thames they beat drums to guide the watermen to the shore. William III suffered from asthma, and in the air of Whitehall his constitutional malady made rapid progress. To save his life, which would almost certainly have been shortened by a prolonged residence in the smoke and fogs of Westminster, he was forced to quit London. At first he took up his abode at Hampton Court, but he finally settled at Kensington House, then a rural mansion, which he purchased and enlarged. Similarly the great glory of English science, Isaac Newton, after living for many years in Jermyn Street, was constrained for the sake of his health to move out to the purer air of Kensington, where he died some years after Addison."

Besides these longer literary efforts Frazer has, from time to time, written short obituary notices of friends who have passed on. In his sketches of Robertson Smith, of Howitt and Fison, of Sir Baldwin Spencer, of William Wyse, and of Canon John Roscoe he has given proof of consummate skill in delineating character and in estimating importance and achievements. Of literary criticism pure and simple we have had all too little from his pen, and the student of

literature must regret at times the tenacity with which he has stuck to his anthropological task. In his prefaces to Pausanias and Ovid he discusses acutely the literary ability of those writers, and in an address delivered to the Cowper Society he discussed, succinctly and yet with infallible accuracy, the great merits of his favourite poet.

Scattered throughout his works are pieces of criticism that show their author's accurate knowledge and shrewd judgment in literary matters. Thus, for example, having in *The Golden Bough* had occasion to quote :—

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honouring thee  
As giving it a hope that there  
It would not wither'd be ;  
But thou thereon didst only breathe  
And sent'st it back to me.  
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,  
Not of itself but thee !

he adds in a footnote :—

“ ‘ Jonson's learned sock ’ was on when he wrote these beautiful verses. See Philostratus, *Epist.* 2 :—

Πέπομφά σοι στέφανον ῥόδων, οὐ σέ τιμῶν, καὶ τοῦτο μὲν γάρ, ἀλλ' αὐτοῖς τι χαριζομένος τοῖς ῥόδοις, ἵνα μὴ μαρανθῇ. And again *Epist.* 46 : Εὖ πεποίηκας στρωμνῇ χρῆσάμενος τοῖς ῥόδοις . . . εἰ δὲ βούλει τι φιλῶ χαριζεσθαι, τὰ λείψανα αὐτῶν ἀντιπεμψον μηκέτι πνέοντα ῥόδων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ σοῦ.

And the thought of the first stanza of the same song :—

Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup  
And I'll not ask for wine,

is also borrowed from the same eloquent writer. See Philostratus, *Epist.* 33 :—

Ἐμοὶ δε μόνοις πρόπινε τοῖς ὄμμασιν . . . . εἰ δὲ βούλει,  
τὸν μὲν οἶνον μὴ παραπόλλυε, μόνου δ' ἐμβαλοῦσα ὕδατος,  
καὶ τοῖς χεῖλεσι προσφέρουσα πλήρου φιλημάτων τό ἔκπωμα  
καὶ οὕτως δίδου τοῖς δεομένοις.

“Elsewhere Philostratus, whose fancy, like that of Herrick, seems to have run much on love and roses, plays on the same thoughts (*Epist.* 60 and 63). Another passage in his letters (*Epist.* 55 : *μαραίνεται καὶ γυνή μετὰ ῥόδων, ἄν βραδύνη. Μὴ μέλλε, ὦ καλή· συμπαίξωμεν, στεφανώσώμεθα τοῖς ῥόδοις, ξὺν δράμωμεν*) might have served as a text for Herrick’s ‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.’ But without doubt the English poet drew his inspiration from living roses in English gardens and English hedges, not from dead Greek roses in the dusty pages of Philostratus.”<sup>1</sup>

We may also quote a passage from the author’s address on Renan to show that he is just as capable of widespread generalizations as he is

<sup>1</sup> Sir James has told me of the great interest with which he discovered these parallels; but he was not the first to do so, for in a note upon the poem in Bell’s edition of Jonson’s Poems (London, 1856) we read that “Cumberland has traced the leading ideas of this familiar song to some scattered passages in the love-letters of Philostratus.”

of detecting parallels. The passage is given in French, in which it was composed and delivered.

“Le pur génie français est clair, logique, plein de bon sens, très porté aux abstractions, aux idées générales, mais beaucoup moins enclin aux choses de la fantaisie et de l'imagination, dont, au fond, il se méfie. Il raisonne bien, il construit facilement de grandes généralisations, mais il ne réussit pas à doter le monde de ces créations imaginatives de tout premier ordre qui font les délices de toutes les générations et de tous les pays. Il nous a donné un Descartes, un Laplace, un Pasteur, mais il lui manque un Homère, un Virgile, un Dante, un Cervantès, un Shakespeare. Au fond, c'est un esprit plutôt prosaïque que poétique, plus fait pour découvrir la vérité des choses que pour créer de nouveaux idéals de beauté et de grandeur. Voltaire lui-même, type parfait du génie français, a nettement déclaré que de toutes les nations polies la France est la moins poétique, et Renan a approuvé le mot.”

Another essay of considerable interest was contributed by Frazer to the *Times Literary Supplement*, and was reprinted in *The Gorgon's Head*—“Condorcet on Human Progress.” In it he describes how that great thinker, while under sentence of death and in hiding from the bloodhounds of the guillotine, wrote his *Sketch of the Progress of the Human Mind*: “Among

compositions born under such sorrowful circumstances Condorcet's book must always hold a high place. It is remarkable as a work of learning, written apparently without reference to a single book; and is still more remarkable for the imperishable confidence which the writer throughout displays, not only in the beneficent character of the revolution to which he was himself so soon to fall a victim, but in the coming of a new and happier epoch for the whole human race, of which he believed the French Revolution to be the splendid dawn. No thought of his own danger, no rancour at the men who had hounded him from public life and were seeking his head, marred the glad and, indeed, exultant vein of reflection in which he beheld France marching in the van of humanity towards an ever-increasing state of happiness, virtue, and perfection. He was among the first, perhaps the very first, to proclaim as a doctrine, and almost as a dogma, the endless perfectibility of human nature." And in a few pages Frazer outlines Condorcet's theories, compares them with the theories of other thinkers, and then defines Condorcet's position in the world of thought. It is altogether a masterly essay, giving proof of critical talents that have been devoted far too exclusively to the science of anthropology.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SCHOLAR

IN attempting to define the position of Sir James George Frazer in the world of learning, we might permissibly dwell for a little upon his scholastic attributes. Though he is, as he says several times, no philologist, he is quite at home in several languages. He reads Greek as other men read English, and has more than once gone through the Hebrew Testament, with little help from a lexicon. As the dedication to *The Gorgon's Head*, and the passage at the end of that book shows, he is well able to express himself in Ciceronian Latin. We may quote from the latter, by way of illustration : “ Scilicet beatus ille mihi prae ceteris esse videtur qui in veri investigatione totus versatur a rumoribus hominum et invidia et prava ambitione longe remotus ac ne mortis quidem metu perturbatus : etenim dum immensas caeli terraeque regiones, dum infinitam et praeteriti temporis et futuri seriem mente contemplatur, fit ut animus a pusillis negotiis curisque aversus et in rerum cognitione defixus fragilitatem humanam quodammodo exuat et immortalitatem nescio quam cogitando capessat. Hac vita qui fruitur



non regibus invidet purpureis, non triumphali scendentibus Capitolium curru, non Olympiaca superbientibus palma. Haec nobis omnibus, quibus florem aetatis ibi carpere contigit, iuventibus arridebant: haec senibus memoria recolentibus placent: haec ut post nos quam plurimis et iuvenibus et senibus edaci intacta tempore placeant, quidquid in caelo deorum est nuncupatis votis precamur et oramus."

Sir James himself thinks more highly of this Latin passage than of anything else he has written, and he has been confirmed in his opinion by the concurrence of some very competent critics, notably the late Canon Nairne and the late Prof. Wyse.

Of the modern languages he is most familiar with French, which indeed he writes better than most Frenchmen, though it is said his accent in speaking it is scarcely that of a native. Of German also he has an intimate and colloquial acquaintance. Of Spanish and Italian and Dutch he has contented himself with a "working knowledge"—that is to say, he reads them fluently, but has never attempted to speak them. His knowledge of Dutch (quite a noteworthy achievement in an English scholar) has been a profitable asset, for by means of it he has been able to make use of the valuable anthropological data accumulated by Dutch missionaries and investigators in the East Indies. But for Frazer the names of Adriani

and Kruijt, of Riedel and Wilken, would probably have remained unknown to most British students of anthropology.

Another asset that has helped to make him the great scholar he is lies in his remarkable industry, his infinite capacity for taking pains. At Cambridge he surpassed undergraduates and professors alike in his power of work; twelve hours a day at his books was quite the usual thing, while fifteen hours was not rare, and I have it on the best authority that he has several times left his library at Trinity College at two in the morning to return to it at eight the same morning. Indeed, when he married, his wife and he agreed that he should be in college and at work by eight o'clock every morning; and this rule they observed throughout all the years they lived at Cambridge. Sundays and holidays make little or no difference: the reading goes on as keenly as ever. When we remember that this has continued for fifty years, we begin to realize the amount of labour that has gone to the making of the books we have been considering. Lord Bryce estimated that Lord Acton must have read on an average an octavo volume a day. Frazer must have equalled this average, and though Acton's *History of Liberty* remained a great project never to be accomplished, we have in *The Golden Bough* the fruits of Frazer's labours.

In passing, we may glance at his method of

working. His reading has always been done pen in hand. Any passage of a book that is of definite interest to anthropology is noted. On completing the book he copies out these passages into his notebooks, or sometimes, when the book is in his own collection, he contents himself with adding references to these passages in a series of smaller index notebooks devoted to birth, property, marriage and burial customs, and so on. Nor is this all. If he comes upon a passage that illustrates or contradicts anything in one of his own works he makes a note of the passage in the margin of that work. As an exponent of the inductive method he lays great stress upon the importance of accumulating illustrations of a custom or theory. It was in this way, to no small measure, that *The Golden Bough* grew from two to twelve volumes, and in the footnotes subsequently added by the author the material for *Aftermath* was accumulated.

To the bibliography which Theodore Besterman compiled of his writings Sir James George Frazer contributed a brief and modest preface in which he spoke of these notebooks. "These unpublished volumes consist of a series of quarto notebooks, some fifty or more in number, written in my own hand and containing much of the fruit of those studies in social anthropology which I have pursued for the best part of half a century. They fall into two

groups, according as the matter in them is classified or not classified in the order of subject. In what I may call the unclassified notebooks, which number about forty, the matter consists of extracts from original authorities on the manners and customs, institutions, laws, religions, and superstitions of the various races of men, especially the races of lower culture whom we call savages or barbarians. Where the originals are in a foreign language, such as French, German, or Dutch, the extracts are sometimes in the form of quotations in the original tongue, sometimes in the form of English translations, but oftener in the form of English summaries or extracts. In some of the notebooks, especially the later, the matter is grouped in a rough geographical order according to the particular region to which the passages refer, special notebooks being assigned, for example, to Europe, Asia, Africa, America, the East Indies, and so forth. In what I may call the classified notebooks, the matter is arranged in the order of the subject, either alphabetically in a single notebook, or oftener in special notebooks, of which each one is devoted to a particular subject, such as Birth, Initiation, Marriage, Hunting and Fishing, Agriculture, War, Disease, and Death. These classified notebooks partake of the nature of indexes, and in them accordingly the matter is usually given in a much abbreviated form, but always with an exact

reference to the original authority." The contents of the unclassified notebooks, as we have seen, have recently been published under the general title of *Anthologia Anthropologica*.

His library has so far defied such efforts as have been made to catalogue it. In his large room at Cambridge are the greater number of his anthropological books. They fill the shelves that surround the walls and project out towards the centre of the room. There are some thirty thousand books there, besides long runs of journals, and annuals, and innumerable pamphlets. Then he has always beside him, whether in London or in Paris, a number of books required for such work as he has in hand. He makes extensive use, moreover, of Cambridge Library, of the London Library, and the libraries of societies like the Royal Geographical and the Royal Anthropological Institute. At the British Museum he is a familiar figure, and for a time a room was put at his disposal there, a facility previously granted only to Lord Curzon and Lord Rosebery.

Though he might be termed catholic in his reading, Frazer has always worked with a definite idea: his life has been a search for first-hand information. Rather than peruse and discuss the theories of other anthropologists, he has been occupied with the narratives of voyagers, travellers, and explorers. Missionaries, from the time of the early Jesuits down

to our own day, have yielded him rich material, nor have the periodicals been neglected, for ten or more of his notebooks are taken up with extracts from the learned periodicals of Britain, France, Germany, India, and America.

Even such wide and zealous reading could not satisfy Frazer's lust for knowledge: he needs must seek information from travellers who were in immediate contact with primitive peoples. For this purpose he drew up a list of questions on the customs, beliefs, and languages of savages which was printed as a small booklet and widely distributed. This pamphlet has been instrumental in stimulating anthropological enquiries in many out-of-the-way parts of the world, as its author intended, and in that manner has added to our knowledge of the subject. Frazer has, moreover, maintained an extensive correspondence with people in many remote parts, and thus has often been able to suggest lines of inquiry and research, and to gain first-hand information. For years he exchanged letters with Baldwin Spencer in Australia, and by his inquiries contributed in some measure to those invaluable works on the Australian aborigines written by Spencer and Gillen. Many of the letters that passed between Spencer and Frazer were published as *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence* by the Oxford University Press in 1932, and in that book it is patent how highly Spencer valued the suggestions of



Frazer, whom he addressed as "my dear Master." Similarly, with Canon John Roscoe in Africa Frazer long kept up a correspondence. Indeed, the files of Frazer's letters contain communications from travellers and anthropologists all over the world throughout the last fifty years.

Besides such remarkable powers of industry, the author of *The Golden Bough* possesses, in a degree probably never surpassed, the scientific temperament. Though not posing as an authority, and forever respectful to specialists when dealing with their own subjects, he recognizes no essential boundary to learning. While he maintains that he is no philologist, and in annotating Ovid admits that his ignorance of astronomy is as great as that poet's, he has invaded several other scholastic domains. If an account of myths of a great flood calls for a geological explanation, by all means let us take geology by the throat and see what it has to say for itself. And if, in our search for the golden bough, we might get a hint from the botanists, we must not let our ignorance of botany stand in our way, but must overcome that ignorance. In his great edition of Pausanias in his efforts to include everything he attacked many domains of learning usually left to specialists, and in this way exploited the findings of archæology, numismatics, epigraphy, and other branches of science to good effect.

And when the solution of one problem suggests other problems, as it does almost invariably, then those subsequent problems must also be tackled. Thus the digressions of *The Golden Bough* and *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* may be explained as De Quincey explained the digressions of Coleridge's soliloquies; the author, in answering a question, attempts also to suggest answers for any questions that may arise from the first.

But, though as diligent in the search for truth as man ever was, Frazer is at the same time always conscious of the elusiveness of truth, always ready to admit that he may be wrong, and to reconsider his opinions in the light of new knowledge. In one place he compares himself to a chameleon, ever ready to change its colour, and in a certain measure the likeness is apt. The opinions put forward in the large edition of *The Golden Bough* are not the same as the opinions advocated in the first edition, and in *Totemism and Exogamy* he outlines theories he has previously held before introducing the hypothesis he now holds to explain the origin of totemism. Thus we have in Frazer's works a state of open mind upheld with as much zeal, integrity, and industry as other men have devoted to the defence of sacred dogmas.

Sir James's reluctance to commit himself to an opinion hastily was once illustrated in an



amusing manner. Lady Frazer went on holiday to a remote part of Cornwall, leaving Sir James busy, as ever, in his library. During her stay there Lady Frazer became engrossed in a French life of Pasteur. Some of the technical terms in that work puzzled her, and one day she bribed a local lad to cycle several miles to the nearest post-office with a telegram to Sir James at Cambridge, which ran "What is *acide racémique*?" Next day the lad cycled over again to the post-office to collect the reply. It ran: "I don't know."

This attitude, an ideal towards which all true scientists may be said to be striving, is perfectly maintained throughout all his anthropological works; but when he leaves his own sphere we may note what appear to be two slight blemishes, two opinions which seem to be dogmatic. In *Creation and Evolution* he questions the theories of modern physicists because they do not fit into the mechanical conception of the universe which he imbibed from Kelvin at Glasgow University, whereas most students of the subject admit that the "quantum theory" of Max Planck is a brilliantly successful though entirely non-mechanical explanation of certain phenomena of radiation. Similarly in his fine essay on Condorcet there is an outspoken condemnation of Karl Marx and of the Russian experiment that appear to be the outcome of political prejudice rather

than disinterested study. These, however, are but trifling lapses from a singularly high standard of rectitude which, by showing that the greatest of scholars may err, have in them something of reassurance for ordinary mortals.

A special quality that has given value to Sir James Frazer's anthropological works is his marvellous insight into the mind of primitive man. Whether, as part of his Scottish heritage, he has inherited enough of the clan spirit and of dialectic subtlety to sympathize with and to understand the workings of the savage mind, or whether he has, like other great men, retained much that is child-like in his character, it is certain that he has attained wonderful intimacy with the peculiar logic of primitive people in all parts of the globe. Field anthropologists in daily contact with natives have often marvelled at the penetration displayed by a man who has never been outside Europe, and, for all practical reasons, seems never to have left his study in Cambridge. More than once it has happened when Sir James has been in conversation with Government Residents home from far-distant districts, or with missionaries from Central Africa, that these men, astonished by his insight, have exclaimed: "Why, you know my blacks better than I know them after twenty years' residence among them!" Once at a luncheon given before a large expedition set out for New Guinea a speaker suggested

that they should take Sir James out with them; but Sir William MacGregor, then Governor of New Guinea, protested vigorously, saying: "Frazer must stay at home, for he is the brains, and we are merely the feelers."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WRITER

No one with any perception of style can have read thus far without being conscious that Frazer writes fine prose. He is, indeed, a master of perfect English, a great writer whose artistic merits have been obscured in the mind of the public by his scientific reputation. Edmund Gosse pointed this out many years ago, in reviewing *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*. "When will these critics," he said, "these self-styled historians of literature, learn that fiction is not the only, nor even the most honourable, form of literary energy? It is quite proper that the many novelists who are genuine artists should receive their meed of praise. It is also quite proper that works of pure science should not be classed with literature on account of the information they contain: but on those rare occasions when their form is as precious as their matter, it is an impertinence to pass them over. On these volumes of Sir James Frazer there is not merely expended enough mental energy, but enough skill in style to furnish about nine hundred of the novels which are published to-day

and bound into sheaves for the burning to-morrow."

The same critic has said that Frazer's model was patently Addison; but that is to simplify too much. In the first place, Frazer's diction shows more Latinity than Addison's. In this way it comes closer to the style of Gibbon. Yet he is not so pompous as Gibbon, nor so uniformly (almost monotonously) periodic in the construction of his sentences. Secondly, Frazer has a wider range of interests than Addison, and has to employ English for purposes to which Addison never had to put it. There are unmistakable echoes of other writers than Addison in Frazer's pages. Again and again we come across a phrase from the Authorized Version, and in his finest passages we seem to hear the organ tones of *Religio Medici*.

In describing scenery Frazer has given us many striking pages, and it is a proof of his marvellous imagination and grasp of details that his descriptions of the Holy Land, which he has not visited, are as vivid and as accurate as his recollections of Greece. Here, by way of example, is a passage describing the wilderness of Judæa:—

"The traveller who, quitting the cultivated lands of central Judæa, rides eastwards towards the Dead Sea, traverses at first a series of rolling hills and waterless valleys covered by broom and grass. But as he pursues his way

onward the scenery changes; the grass and thistles disappear, and he gradually passes into a bare and arid region, where the wide expanse of brown or yellow sand, of crumbling limestone, and of scattered shingle is only relieved by thorny shrubs and succulent creepers. Not a tree is to be seen; not a human habitation, not a sign of life meets the eye for mile after mile. Ridge follows ridge in monotonous and seemingly endless succession, all equally white, steep, and narrow, their sides furrowed by the dry beds of innumerable torrents, and their crests looming sharp and ragged against the sky above him as the traveller ascends from the broad flats of soft white marl, interspersed with flints, which divide each isolated ridge from the one beyond it. The nearer slopes of these desolate hills look as if they were torn and rent by water-spouts; the more distant heights present the aspect of gigantic dust heaps. In some places the ground gives out a hollow sound under the horse's tread; in others the stones and sand slip from beneath the animal's hoofs; and in the frequent gullies the rocks glow with a furnace heat under the pitiless sun which beats down on them out of the cloudless firmament. Here and there, as we proceed eastward, the desolation of the landscape is momentarily lightened by a glimpse of the Dead Sea, its waters of a deep blue appearing in a hollow of the hills and contrasting refreshingly with the dull drab colouring

of the desert foreground. When the last ridge is surmounted and he stands on the brink of the great cliffs, a wonderful panorama bursts upon the spectator. Some two thousand feet below him lies the Dead Sea, visible in its whole length from end to end, its banks a long succession of castellated crags, bastion beyond bastion, divided by deep gorges, with white capes running out into the calm blue water, while beyond the lake rise the mountains of Moab to melt in the far distance into the azure of the sky." Similarly in *Totemism and Exogamy* there are many striking pages describing the country in which the primitive aborigines of Australia live.

But apart from these "purple passages" there is a dignity and grace about everything that Frazer has written. If, to take a random example, he wishes to say that the early Phœnicians visited Cyprus, attracted by the wealth of the island, and settled there, he does so in these words: "The island of Cyprus lies but one day's sail from the coast of Syria. Indeed, on fine summer evenings its mountains may be descried looming low and dark against the red fires of sunset. With its rich mines of copper and its forests of firs and stately cedars, the island naturally attracted a commercial and maritime people like the Phœnicians; while the abundance of its corn, its wine, and its oil must have rendered it in their eyes a Land of Promise by comparison with the niggardly

nature of their own rugged coast, hemmed in between the mountains and the sea." It might be permissible, perhaps, to call attention to the amount of information imparted in that short passage.

When we consider the quantity and variety of Sir James Frazer's writings, the great heights that he has sometimes attained, and the high standard that he has unfailingly observed, we must count him among the greatest of our prose writers. In our generation we look in vain for someone to whom we might compare him.

It is fairly safe to say that there will always be readers of *The Golden Bough*, and that when the literary historian of a future age turns his attention to our period he will have a good deal to say about both the matter and the style of Frazer's writings. In my judgment Frazer, while ranking with Darwin as an innovator in the world of thought, will as a writer be classed with Ruskin and De Quincey among the master craftsmen of our literature.

Frazer's many works, one notes with interest, have all been written by his own hand in his neat handwriting, and with no assistance beyond that of a steel pen. The amount of manual labour involved, quite apart from the intensive research and the difficulties of composition that have accompanied it, must have been immense, yet so little does the author estimate it that after each volume is printed he destroys the



manuscript. While actually engaged in writing, he refreshes his mind from time to time by reading classic works of English prose.

The feeling for words which has made Frazer such a master of prose has also displayed itself in the poems which he has written from time to time. Some of his verses were reprinted in *The Gorgon's Head*. The best of these is perhaps *June in Cambridge*, which reflects its writer's outlook so faithfully that it may be quoted fully.

Another June is passing,  
And faded is the may,  
And still o'er books I linger  
The livelong summer day.

For me there is no summer,  
No deep woods sunlight-pied,  
No purple heather on the hill,  
A wimpling burn beside.

For me no rippling river  
Flows on by weald and wold,  
With lilies on its bosom  
And its feet on sands of gold.

I shall not feel the breezes,  
I may not smell the sea  
That breaks to-day in Scotland  
On shores how dear to me !

I'm far away, dear Scotland,  
A prisoner in the halls  
Where sluggish Cam steals silent  
By ancient English walls.

Still, still I con old pages  
And through great volumes wade,  
While life's brief summer passes,  
And youth's brief roses fade.

Ah yes ! through these dull pages  
A glimmering vista opes,  
Where fairer flowers are blowing  
Than bloom on earthly slopes.

The dreamland world of fancy !  
There is my own true home,  
There are the purple mountains  
And blue seas fringed with foam.

And there the deathless garlands  
That crown the chosen head,  
When youth's brief June is over,  
And youth's brief roses dead.

Here are two other poems from his pen, which first appeared in *Les Langues Modernes* for July 1935.

#### WHISPERS OF THE NILE

Mighty river rushing ever,  
League on league and mile on mile,  
What's the message that you bring me  
In the whispers of the Nile ?  
You have seen the generations  
Come and go like summer leaves ;  
You have seen the sowers sowing,  
And the reapers bind their sheaves.  
You have seen great kings and heroes,  
Ladies bright and captains bold,  
Passing ever more like shadows  
In the wondrous days of old.  
What's the message, mighty river,  
You have kept so long from me,  
In your passage from the mountains  
To the blue, the midland sea ?

" I'm immortal," says the river,  
" For I flow as once I flowed,  
Ages long, unwearied ever,  
In the wondrous days of old.

You are mortal," says the river,  
"Do not weep and do not sigh,  
You were born, but not for ever;  
Born to live, but born to die.  
You must follow in the footsteps  
Of your fathers long ago;  
And the head you bear so proudly  
In the dust must soon lie low.  
That's the message," says the river;  
"Do not sob and do not smile:  
But take heart and learn a lesson  
From the whispers of the Nile."

The same almost oppressive consciousness of human mortality is expressed in his poem called *Dreams*.

Dreaming of thee, my mother,  
Dreaming of thee,  
And the home where the hills of Gareloch  
Come softly down to the sea;

Dreaming of thee, my sister,  
Dreaming of thee,  
Who sleepest beside our mother  
In the churchyard by the sea;

Dreaming of friends who slumber  
In graves that are sundered far,  
One in the bed of the Ocean,  
And one 'neath a southern star;

Shall we meet again, I wonder,  
From graves so far and wide,  
From under the starry heaven,  
From under the rolling tide?

No, no : they are gone, and for ever  
They sleep by sea or shore.  
They will wake no more from their slumber,  
Never more, oh never more.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MAN AND HIS INFLUENCE

IN appearance Sir James George Frazer was, until the weight of increasing years bowed his figure and the reading of endless books dimmed his sight, short and erect, and agile upon his feet. (Walking was always his favourite exercise, and he has often covered more than thirty miles in a day.) A French observer remarked some years ago upon his bright blue eyes: "What strikes one especially about his appearance is the clarity and colour of his eyes; they are of an extraordinary, a sapphire blue. His whole face reflects a great power of attention and meditation. It is almost the visage of a doctor, with its air of minute application and its short white beard"; and a Scottish friend pointed out in 1932 that "though within an ace of being an octogenarian, there is not a single line on the face of this happy old man." Some further words of the same friend may be quoted, since they are obviously written from personal knowledge: "Though he worked without pause, he has always been ready to welcome friends; he has never grudged them his time, nor his trouble—endless are his services

to literature by his correcting the proofs of clumsy pens; by at times practically re-writing some books of colleagues under the plea of proof-correction whenever he considered their contributions of value to science, but not written clearly and well enough for the general reader. Thus he added to his own unaided tasks that of helping the writing of some friends or colleagues."

Though he has little patience with fools when they write books, he is towards people invariably polite. In his manners there is an air of courtly grace that makes one think he would have been more at home in his beloved eighteenth century than in these hurried days. Those who have met him have often been struck by his unwillingness to speak about the books he has written. (I don't think I have ever heard him speak of *The Golden Bough* except by its initials, "the G.B.") There is no pose in this; it does not arise, as some think, from an excess of modesty (though he is a very modest man), but from the fact that he is always more interested in the work he has in hand or is about to undertake than in what he has done. When, after many years of labour, his *Pausanias* was completed and published, the occasion was marked by a dinner-party at Cambridge. In several speeches he was congratulated upon his achievement, but all he would say was that he hoped to do better next time.

His life has been free of the vices that clog the thoughts of lesser men. He is, indeed, one of those rare people whose inmost thoughts could be freely uttered without bringing them shame. A clergyman who had known Sir James intimately for forty years expressed a higher opinion of the man than of his books, and declared Sir James to be the best man he had ever known. College servants, who had also known him for a long time, though on a different footing, expressed the same opinion in their own way.

In politics, he is, if anything, a Liberal, for he regarded Asquith as his leader. I say, if anything, because he has practised the habit of looking at every side of a question so intensively that he cannot lay it aside when he comes to consider politics. His outlook upon international questions had been deeply coloured by his affection for France. Some years ago he pleaded eloquently in the daily press for the remission of France's War debt to Britain, and in 1935 he put forward the suggestion that France and Britain should work together in closer amity, and thereby ensure the peace of the world.

This feeling towards France is reflected in one of his latest poems, *The Keys of Janus's Temple*. In a note he explains that in ancient Rome the gates of Janus's temple were closed in times of peace, but kept open in times of

war, as if to invite the god to go to battle for his people.

Two sister-nations, long at war,  
But now at peace for ever more,

England and France,  
Knit by a common bond of blood poured out  
For freedom, justice, truth, ye hold the keys  
Of Janus' Temple, grip them tight, let not  
The monster loose to devastate the world.

While at the portal grim you keep your watch  
None dares to tamper with the rusty bolts  
That barricade the fiend. O falter not,  
Be firm and watchful; on your watch depends  
The welfare of a world that else is lost.

Frazer's influence upon human thought has been so extensive and so manifold that it would be quite impossible to define it accurately. The only parallel that suggests itself is that of Renan, who, though primarily a student of Semitic languages and religious history, yet vitally influenced the mental outlook of his generation. But though Frazer has, by the charm of his style, attracted to the study of anthropology many who otherwise would have had no interest in the subject, just as through Renan many Frenchmen last century were attracted to the early history of the Semitic people, yet Frazer's influence has invaded wider fields than did that of Renan. And whereas several of Renan's conjectures, especially in his *History of the People of Israel*, have been proved untenable by the industry of excavators, Frazer's works are of abiding interest quite apart from the hypotheses that he puts forward in them.

In his own field—that of anthropology—Frazer's predominance has been long acknowledged. Prof. C. G. Seligman, for instance, says that "when the history of British anthropology during the last half century or something more comes to be written, it will be found that three names stand clear away from those of their contemporaries—Tylor, Haddon, and Frazer. Each of these men represents an aspect of the science of man : Tylor as the initiator of general ethnology in the modern critical sense; Haddon receiving the torch and begetting (with Rivers's help) a school of precise field anthropology; Frazer, the supreme interpreter on the literary side of man's hopes, fears, and beliefs, his relations with his gods, his fellows, and with his own soul." And Malinowski adds that "if we define an anthropologist as one who passionately loves the continuity of tradition and works for its preservation and development; who also brings to this task a profound knowledge of our own mythology as well as of the superstitions of other savages—Sir James Frazer is the greatest anthropologist of our age."

But far beyond the boundary of anthropology Frazer's influence is felt. The student of archæology finds in the pages of Frazer many hints to the solution of problems that meet him in the field. To take an obvious case, the belief in a life after death, as entertained by many primitive natives to-day, has led them



to bury with their deceased friends the weapons and utensils of which they made use in life, in order that they might use them in the spirit land; and there is little reason to doubt that when prehistoric man buried weapons with his dead he did it from the same belief and for the same purpose.

The student of religions has been made conscious, through Frazer's labours, of the large substratum of primitive superstition and mythology that underlies all the orthodox beliefs held by civilized man.

The historian, in his research for the beginnings of things, can no longer shut his eyes to all that came before the Greeks and the Romans, for those people, it is now plain, did not create their great civilizations out of nothing, but founded many of their institutions and beliefs upon conceptions which they shared with people much more primitive than themselves. Then again, by showing that men have shared the same thoughts from earliest times to our own days, Frazer has given yet another basis of continuity to the whole study of history. The study of history has been affected in another way by the influence of Frazer, for, inspired by the example of *The Golden Bough*, one of the greatest of living historians has attempted a philosophic survey of the whole field of human history which looks like approaching its prototype in erudition and philosophic sagacity.

Frazer's work has had important results in the study of psychology. In Flugel's excellent book, *A Hundred Years of Psychology*, we read that Tylor's and Frazer's "general outlook was one that later on became adopted and developed by the psycho-analysts, in whose hands the general similarities between the different aspects of 'primitive mind'—whether in the child, the dreamer, the neurotic, or the savage—have recently undergone an elaboration which seems likely to establish a successful and progressive 'comparative psychology.' " Several specialists have approached the data accumulated by Frazer in his works from their own particular angle. Thus in 1912 Freud applied psychology to anthropology in his *Totem and Taboo*, in which he sought to interpret the facts accumulated in *Totemism and Exogamy*. Needless to say, Freud stresses the sexual aspects of totemism much more than does Frazer. So too in 1920 the eminent psychologist Carveth Read published his interesting book, *The Origin of Man and his Superstitions*, in which he discussed psychologically the general conditions of belief in primitive minds, magic, animism, the mind of the wizard, and kindred subjects.

In the domain of literature Frazer's influence has been widespread beyond the knowledge of any one man. Again and again in fiction we come across passages that have been inspired, directly or indirectly, by some passage of his,

and in poetry we seem to catch innumerable echoes of his words. To give one instance: in the notes to his poem, *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot states that "to another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*."

By way of illustrating the general importance of Sir James George Frazer, two comments by shrewd observers of contemporary affairs may be quoted. The first comment is that of Gerald Heard: "The author of *The Golden Bough* holds a unique position in our present world. There are few men of letters writing to-day of whom it can be said with greater certainty that their works will be collected. For Sir James is both a man of letters and also an historian; and, as Bury said when he edited *The Decline and Fall* and noted how Gibbon had endured, this is a combination which makes a man immortal.

"Indeed Sir James's position may, when men look back, appear even more commanding than Gibbon's. For Gibbon only made ordered and more amusing for the polished world what was known to every contemporary scholar about the ancient world. But Frazer revealed a completely strange world, and strove to interpret, not to mock, its strangeness. Yet both major historians have this in common, that they all attacked with great effect what

they took to be superstition. Both felt that they stood in the light and looked back into darkness, the one with the darkness of a ruin, the other into that of the primeval forest. Gibbon, we see, was largely mistaken. Much that he took to be decay was life which he could not understand. For, great though Gibbon's influence undoubtedly has been, he was not original. Down the defiles of the Darkening Ages, which as an historian he disclosed, he threw only the beam of the Enlightenment and the shafts of the Encyclopædists. But Frazer adds to man of letters and historian also the title of scientist. Almost as much as his history is his own, is the philosophy with which he interprets that history."

The other comment is by H. N. Brailsford: "When posterity comes to estimate the work of our age, the record of Sir James Frazer would suffice, almost of itself, to redeem it of a charge of sterility. It is a work, to be sure, which sums up and organizes the past, marshals it, so to say, with the sweep of an encyclopædic construction of theory; the sort of work, as Spengler tells us, which civilization performs after its creative ardour is spent. That is to undervalue it grossly: science, when she brings to bear upon the meaningless disorder of fact such inventive insight as Frazer's, creates as truly and as boldly as art. The mere bulk which this man has produced, since *The Golden*

*Bough* grew from its two to its twelve volumes, would compel respect, but when one analyses a page of his writing, with its closely-packed material drawn from a dozen sources in five or six languages, one asks by what miracle he fitted twenty-four months into his year.

"Scholars before him may have equalled this monument of toil, but Frazer has the kind of genius which, in spite of Carlyle, goes so rarely with this 'infinite capacity for taking pains.' He conjectures with a boldness which ranks him among the great pioneers: he has in his speculation a vision so far-reaching that one marvels at the power of this eye to adjust itself to the microscopic focus which much of his work demands. With it all, this exact yet daring scientist is also a great writer. It is much that he is always lucid and never writes a less than perfect sentence, but these are the least of the merits of an artist who can pass with ease from humorous irony to the high colours of a *bravura* passage.

"Frazer's lifetime covers a rich period in the growth of his science of folk-lore and mental anthropology. He has had great contemporaries, German, French, Dutch, and Finnish as well as English. But none of them approached him, unless it be Mannhardt, in the scope of his speculative range, or came near him, unless it be Westermarck, in his appeal to the intelligence of the educated layman. His service to

his age is not merely that he laid for the first time the foundations of a science which explains the origins of religion: more than this, he made his results as much a necessary part of the culture of our day as Darwin did. It was very quietly done, this final stroke in the long struggle to free men's minds from the terror of the supernatural, but perhaps it has been the most effective."

Nor is Sir James Frazer's influence confined to his own country. In English or in translations his works have been read all over the world, and in France he is something of a national hero, for it is said that there every intelligent young person reads him. In the summer of 1935 the French translation of the complete *Golden Bough* was completed, so that the whole twelve volumes are now accessible in that language. This remarkable achievement has been due in no small measure to the energy and ability of Lady Frazer. The high opinion in which he is generally held in that country is reflected in the words written about him some years ago by his friend, Anatole France:—

"C'est par l'étude des sauvages que ce savant nous donne des connaissances nouvelles sur la primitive humanité. Je n'avais pas besoin de dire ce que tout le monde sait; mais on a plaisir à voir naître une science nouvelle.

"A chaque génération la connaissance de

l'homme s'étend et s'approfondit. Ce que Montesquieu fut dans son temps Frazer l'est dans le nôtre et la différence de leurs œuvres montre le progrès des idées.

“Frazer nous a donné de l'homme la connaissance la plus vaste et la plus neuve. Ce nom d'anthropologiste qui, chez nous, garde encore une signification étroite prend avec lui le sens le plus large. Il nous a fait entrer dans la pensée des barbares d'aujourd'hui et des temps lointains; il a éclairé d'une lumière nouvelle cette antiquité grecque et latine que nous pensions connaître; il a substitué aux fables que l'homme imagine pour expliquer sa propre origine les premières données d'une science rigoureuse, qui n'existait pas avant lui.

“Critique sévère de lui-même, il a créé une méthode scrupuleuse et sûre, qui s'ajoute aux instruments que l'homme se forge péniblement pour approcher de la vérité.”

Rarely indeed, at any time or among any people, have the same qualities been brought together with which James George Frazer is so richly endowed: rarely has the world seen the same passionate desire for knowledge, the same incessant search for truth, the same faculty for detecting the mainsprings of human thought and action in the customs and beliefs of other people, or the same unimpeachable integrity in setting them forth. These qualities, together

with a gift for prose not surpassed in our time, which has gained him the ear of all thinking people, have helped him to bring about a mighty revolution, as yet scarce realized, in human thought.



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